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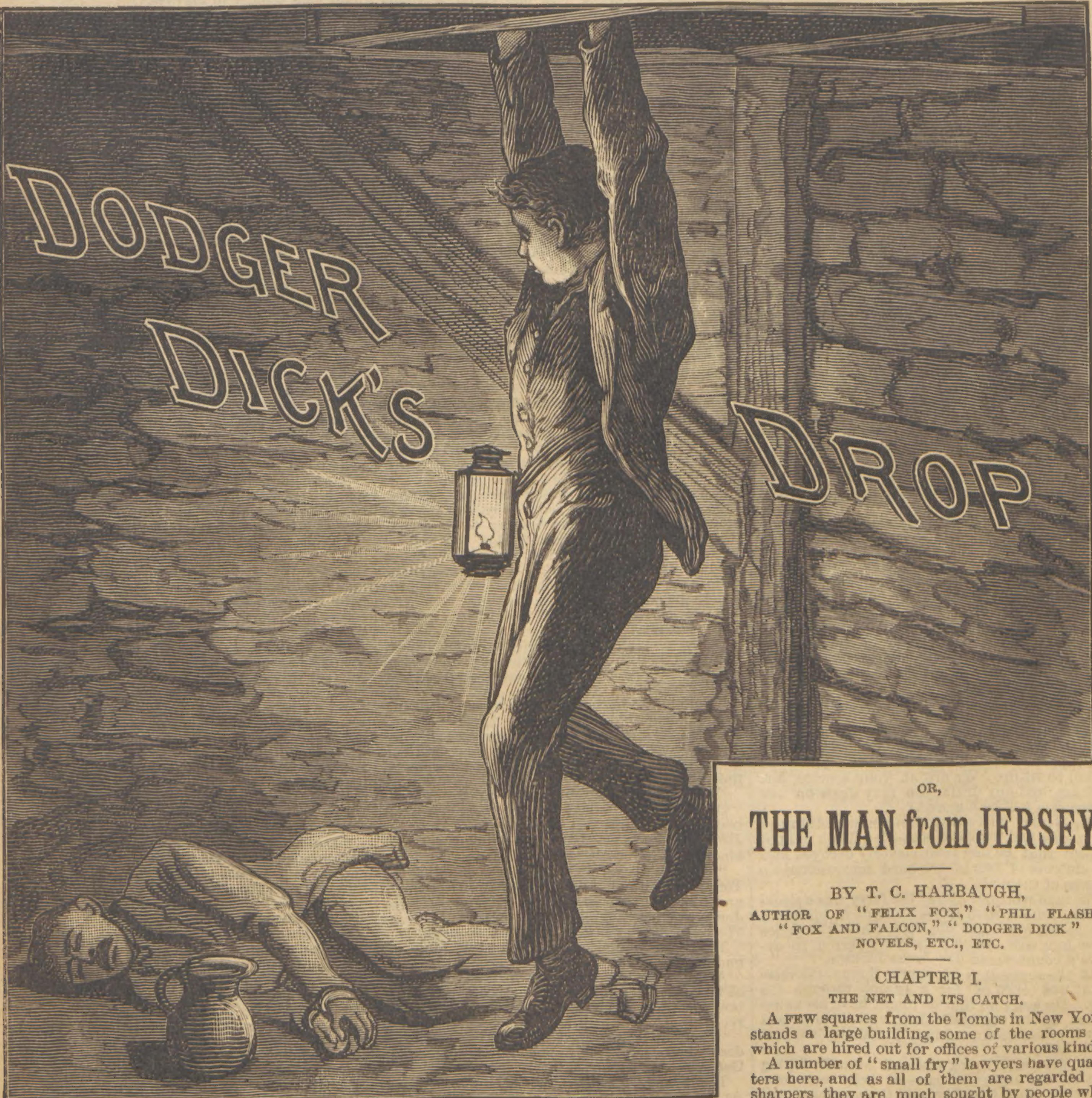
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OR, THE MAN from JERSEY.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,
AUTHOR OF "FELIX FOX," "PHIL FLASH,"
"FOX AND FALCON," "DODGER DICK"
NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE NET AND ITS CATCH.

A FEW squares from the Tombs in New York stands a large building, some of the rooms of which are hired out for offices of various kinds.

A number of "small fry" lawyers have quarters here, and as all of them are regarded as sharpers they are much sought by people who want to avoid justice, and who have some questionable work on hand.

On the second floor of this building a tin sign is still to be seen tacked to a certain door, and the light in the hall is strong enough to let one read the inscription:

SPICK AND SPANN,
Attorneys at Law.
PROMPT AND SURE.

The office beyond the door is small and not too clean. It has one window that looks out upon the street and a cramped private consultation room.

Stephen Spick and Sandy Spann were as alike as two eggs.

They were sharp-nosed, sharp-eyed men, active and cautious. They knew who to fleece and who to let alone, and when they dipped their hands into any thing they were sure of finding a prize.

Their reputation for shrewd dealing had gone abroad, and clients were numerous. They had some clients of whom they would not have spoken in public for the world, and they had others, who languished behind the bars of the famous prison a few blocks away.

It was a lazy afternoon in midsummer when these two sharps were discussing a certain case which had claimed their services.

Both had their feet on the table in the middle of the room, and clouds of tobacco-smoke were dancing along the ceiling overhead.

Stephen Spick was forty years old, his partner's senior by two years, but Sandy Spann made up in looks and experience what he lacked in age.

The latter was in the midst of an opinion, when the office-door opened and a man with an old-fashioned valise appeared on the sill.

In an instant the lawyers removed their feet from the table, and their faces became wreathed in smiles of welcome.

"Come in and take a seat. Glad to see you," said Spann.

The man came forward and dropped somewhat awkwardly into the chair which had been pushed forward.

He was a person in middle life and rather good-looking.

His clothes had a rural cut, and were new, and his whiskers, silken and dark, helped to stamp him just what he was—a country merchant.

The lawyers immediately opened conversation, and in less than five minutes they had made themselves acquainted with their visitor's personality.

He was Jonas Jackson, a prosperous merchant in the interior of New Jersey, and he had come to New York for the purpose of laying in a stock of new goods. It was his first visit to the city, and he had been directed to Messrs. Spick and Spann by a man whom he had encountered at the ferry.

"One of our clients, probably," observed Spick, rubbing his hands together when Mr. Jackson reached this point in his narrative. "You want the advice of competent people concerning the business houses of New York—where is the best place to buy, and how to purchase, and so forth. We don't brag on ourselves, sir, but I can say without bombast that the gentleman whom you fell in with at the ferry knew what he was talking about when he sent you here. You intend to put in a clever stock, I presume?"

"Yes. I have ten thousand dollars to invest."

"No one-horse store, I see," continued Stephen Spick, as his eyes glittered. "Your town will support an establishment of the kind you intend to set up. We are at your service, Mr. Jackson, and any draft you may draw on our experience will be honored."

The Jersey merchant who knew nothing of the rogues and rascallities of New York did not suspect that he had been cleverly decoyed into the clutches of two of the most unconscionable scamps of them all.

The man who met him at the ferry was a sleek-looking fellow, with an oily tongue in his head. His hands were like silk, and, while the police knew him well, he was the very person to deceive a countryman like Jonas Jackson.

At the suggestion of Sandy Spann, the merchant was taken out for a ramble through the city. He was told that he might have his valise locked up in the firm's desk, and when he had seen the operation performed, he thought it perfectly safe.

On the street Spick excused himself, saying that several important cases of theirs were coming up in court that day, and the merchant was turned over to Spann.

He was taken to the Battery, and over the "L" road to Central Park. Then he was shown the wharves and the shipping, escorted across the Great Bridge, and taken back by a round-about way to the street, where the two fleecers kept their net spread.

More than once during this trip the simple Jersey merchant had been made to open his eyes. Sandy Spann knew just what to show him to excite his wonder, and while he was exhibiting the city, he was drawing from his victim everything concerning himself, and his business and family connections.

It was sundown when the two came back to the big building that contained the offices.

They went up-stairs and found the office occupied by Stephen Spick and—the gentleman who had accidentally met Mr. Jackson, at the landing!

The meeting was quite pleasant on the part of both. The mutual friend, who called himself Titus Todd, was glad that the merchant had fallen in with such agreeable gentlemen as Spick and Spann, and he took occasion to remark that he could vouch for their honesty, and was proud to claim their friendship.

During his rambles with Mr. Spann, the merchant had made a few purchases, and all for one person.

He was a widower with one child, a young miss of seventeen named Janet.

He was thoroughly devoted to her, and more than once during the day he had broken out in somewhat extravagant praise of her charms.

In presence of the three men he took from his pockets some presents for Janet. There were several costly little toilet articles, a ring, and a tiny lady's watch.

The lawyers and their associate praised his selection, and when he had shown all he put the articles away in his valise.

"Now for supper," said Stephen Spick. "Of course you will remain our guest for awhile yet, Mr. Jackson. Our friend Todd, here, suggests that you try the viands of his table, and we will make a clever party of four. In anticipation of your acceptance, we have ordered a cab, and will go to the hotel on wheels."

Five minutes later four men left the office and went down to the sidewalk, where a carriage was found drawn up to the curbing, and all entered.

Away went the horses, their glossy skins shining in the lamplight, and in a moment, as it were, the cab had disappeared.

The next day Spick and Spann were found in their office, with their feet on the table and tobacco-smoke above their heads.

They looked at peace with the world, as they probably were, for now and then they laughed, and blew smoke-rings about their heads.

Jonas Jackson, the Jersey merchant, did not drop in to renew the acquaintance of the previous day, and there was nothing to show that the lawyers were waiting for him. By and by Titus Todd came in with his mustache waxed to needle-points, and his clothes brushed to a hair.

He shut the door behind him, and added his feet to the others already on the table.

"It was well done, eh?" he laughed, looking at the lawyers.

"The best play I ever saw," replied Spick, with the low laugh for which he was distinguished. "The tracks are covered up so well, too."

"Could not be better. I thought something would come into the net, ere long; but, the richness of the pigeon's plumage exceeded my expectations. What have you done with the nick-nacks?" and Todd glanced at the desk as he finished.

"Oh, they're safe!" assured Sandy Spann. "Of course we would not let *them* give anybody away. This was no water haul; but, by Jove, I'd like to see that girl be talked so much about! Janet he called her, I believe."

"I'd like to see her, myself!" echoed Titus Todd. "You've got a wife of your own, Sandy, and I have none. But, unless we go down into Jersey we are not apt to see Janet Jackson. We've 'seen' her father, and that is enough!"

The three laughed in chorus at this allusion, and for a moment smoked in silence.

After awhile Todd went down-stairs alone, and as he left the building he nearly ran against a boy who dodged out of sight before he could be recognized.

"Confound the street vermin!" growled the decoy, recovering; "I hate 'em! Here's a gang. Get out o' the way, rats."

The "gang" consisted of half a dozen street Arabs boisterously dividing among themselves the remnants of a bunch of bananas which a

street vender had given away because they were half spoiled.

Titus pushed his way through the crowd, throwing them right and left, and though he hurried away, he did not escape the boy against whom he had almost stumbled, a few moments before.

He was followed and watched for awhile, and then was left entirely to himself as if the boy had mistaken his man.

CHAPTER II.

JANET'S MISSION.

It is three weeks later, and the lights of New York are flashing everywhere between the two rivers and from the city's northernmost boundaries to the sea.

A young girl with a weary look but well dressed stops a man on the sidewalk and asks to be directed to the Mulberry Police Headquarters.

"Are you lost, my child?" asks the gentleman who sees that a certain country appearance clings to the girl.

"No, sir, I am not lost but some one else is," is the answer. "I thank you for your kindness. I can find the building now," and off she goes, with quickened step and watched by the gentleman with wonder in his eyes.

A few moments afterward she crosses the threshold of that building which is the terror of the evil-doer, and stands hesitating in the light which reveals her pretty face and graceful figure.

The officer in charge of the office into which she has stepped catches sight of her, and comes forward with a kindly smile.

"What can I do for you, miss?"

In a moment the face before him grows white, and all at once a pair of shapely hands fall upon his arm.

"I am looking for my father," she exclaims, looking up into his face. "I am Janet Jackson, and my home is in Cherry Vale, New Jersey. My father left home three weeks ago, with ten thousand dollars on his person, to purchase a stock of goods in this city. Since then I have not had a line from him. Oh, sir, can't you tell me something about him?"

There was a pathos in the last words which made the officer's lips quiver.

He seemed to see at once that it was a serious case.

"I want the whole story, my child," said he. "Sit down and tell me all you know, give me a full description of your father, and then leave the rest with us."

Janet appeared to take hope at these words. The color came back to her cheeks and her eyes brightened again.

She was eager to tell all she knew, which was not much. She gave an accurate description of the Jersey merchant, and the officer noted it down with great care.

"Do you think you can find him?" asked the girl. "I know three weeks have elapsed, but they tell me that you police can solve a great many mysteries. I read a story once about a man who came here and disappeared just as father has done, and that man was found a month afterward."

"Yes, and he was a merchant, too," answered the officer. "I can only say that we will do the best we can."

"I can ask no more," and then Janet sat silent a few moments. "I'm afraid that he unwisely showed his money to people who should not have seen it. He knew nothing about the wickedness of a great city like this, and I know no more than he. Yet, I fear he has been entrapped and robbed, if nothing more. The ten thousand dollars constituted our entire fortune. I can promise no reward, because I have no money for that purpose."

"Don't let that trouble you, miss. It is our duty to unearth crime if it has been committed, and the police force of New York is at your service, without the shadow of an expected reward to urge it on."

"A thousand thanks," cried the girl.

"Where are you going to stay to-night?"

"I don't know."

"You have no relatives here?"

"None. We used to have, though."

"Ah! What was the name?"

"Gambray."

The officer turned to a Directory and ran his eye down the G's.

"The name is not here," he responded, with a glance at Janet, who had been watching him intently.

"I recollect hearing father say that our relations left the city two years ago."

Then a Directory three years' old was brought forth, and the G's were once more consulted.

"Ah!" he suddenly exclaimed. "Gambray, Mrs. Mary, widow; No. 666 O— street. Is that the person, miss?"

"It is," answered Janet. "She was father's cousin and a widow."

The officer seemed to make a mental note of the record in the Directory, which he shut with a bang.

"I invite you to my house," he went on. "My wife is alone, and will be glad to do all she can for you. Besides, I want to have you where we can find you readily when needed."

Janet accepted the proffered kindness with grateful heart. She was alone in New York, and a deep, dark mystery weighed her down.

She burst into tears when she realized her situation, and for a long time sat with her face buried in her hands.

While thus weeping a well-built boy came in and looked from the girl to the officer and back again.

He was good looking, with an intelligent countenance and a pair of keen black eyes.

After watching Janet for a minute he tiptoed past her to where the sergeant stood waiting for her to become calm, and looked up into his face.

"What's the racket now, Tom?" he asked, and his voice was almost a whisper.

"It's a case of mysterious disappearance, Dick," was the reply, accompanied by a glance toward the girl.

"Is it a bad one?" continued the boy.

"It has a bad look. I don't like it. He came here three weeks ago with ten thousand on his person, and the girl knows nothing more."

"What o' the name?"

"Jonas Jackson."

"From Jersey?"

"Yes." The officer looked at the boy as if he had said something startling, and yet he had merely asked whether the missing man was from New Jersey.

"Dick, I want you to escort the young lady to my house," the officer resumed. "I have offered her asylum, for she is a stranger here, and she has accepted. You will take a note along which will tell my wife all she need know for the present. You can talk to her on the way up."

"I'm glad of the chance, Tom. Here's something for me to work at again."

By this time Janet had dried her tears, though traces of them still remained, and the officer on duty introduced the boy as Richard Sly, saying incidentally that he was called Dodger Dick by many.

The young girl accepted the boy's escort, and when the officer had written a note to his wife, and assured Janet that a description of her father with all known particulars of his disappearance should be sent out immediately, the couple left the building.

"We will walk a little distance and then take a car," remarked Dick to his companion. "Now tell me all you know about his coming to New York."

Although it was a sad story for her to repeat so soon, Janet did not hesitate, and Dodger Dick listened without interrupting the narrative to its close.

"He came in on a Thursday," she was surprised to hear the boy say. "He fell in with a sharp about the first thing."

"How do you know?" exclaimed Janet.

"I carry a pair of sharp eyes in my head," laughed the boy. "I happened to have nothing at all on my hands that very Thursday afternoon."

"And you saw him?"

"I can't say that I did, miss, nor will I say that I did not. I know a good deal about the money-traps and the man-snares in New York; I've deals with the wolves and the owls of Gotham, and I recollect that I nearly stumbled against a certain man that Thursday night."

Janet looked at Dick a full second before she spoke again.

"I believe you can learn something about father," she cried.

"I cannot say."

"You will help me, though."

"I will not leave a stone unturned!" declared Dick, with rising enthusiasm. "Your father's case is a deep one. He came here with money enough to tempt hundreds of desperate villains who take life for wealth. He has been missing three weeks; the trail is an old one."

"I know! I know! but we must not despair!" broke forth Janet. "He is all the relative I

have to cling to. My distant cousin, Mrs. Gambray, who used to live in this city—"

"Your cousin?" interrupted the boy. "Was she related to you?"

"Distantly; but why?"

"Oh, she's the widow who married a blood-leech of a lawyer named Sandy Spann. Steve Spick is his partner, and a precious team they make, too! Your forty-second cousin, eh? That's funny. But here's the car. We'll finish the trip on wheels."

Fifteen minutes after entering the car, Janet was cordially welcomed by the police officer's wife, and Dodger Dick, with a cheery good-night, and a promise that he would do his best, turned from the house.

"I can't exactly see through a stone wall, but I can look deeper into some things than into others," he muttered. "It is an old trail, sure enough, but I'm going to find it. I thought at the time something was wrong, and I know it now."

At the same time Dick turned a corner and almost ran into the arms of a man whose mustache was waxed to needle-points.

CHAPTER III.

THE DODGER BEGINS.

THE boy drew back instinctively and stared a moment at the man, who was none other than our previous acquaintance, Titus Todd, the decoy.

Whether he was on Dick's trail, or whether the meeting was one of the accidental kind, the young ferret could not determine at the time.

His plan was to assume that it was the latter and to get away before he should be recognized, as he was known to many men as a boy spy and detective.

Dodging to one side Dick managed to put several steps between him and the mutual friend, and in a moment he was off.

He went back to Mulberry street where he found Tom Trupp, the police sergeant, ready to consult with him over the mysterious disappearance of Janet's father.

Several detectives were at the station, and Dick was welcomed by all.

He was told that an exact description of the missing man had been sent to the members of the police and detective force, and one of the men, who greeted the young Vidocq, said that he would be found dead or alive within ten hours.

At this Dodger Dick shook his head.

"You are not so sanguine," smiled the detective.

"I confess that I am not," was the reply. "When there are ten thousand dollars at stake, men are apt to blind their trail. Besides, Jonas Jackson, if found at all, is likely to be found dead, for 'dead men tell no tales' you know. I did not say anything to Janet about this for the poor girl is in sorrow enough."

"Have you no theory, Dick?"

"Not now. I may have one before to-morrow night."

The boy detective went home.

Mrs. Sturgeon, his foster-mother, was up, though the hour was late, and Dick threw himself into a chair at the table and laughed.

"Mammy Sturgeon, I've got a new case!" he announced. "This time it is a mysterious disappearance. A simple Jersey merchant comes to New York, with a great amount of money on his person. He seems to disappear from the moment of his arrival here. His daughter, a very pretty girl of seventeen, Janet by name, has come on in search of him. She is broken-hearted, poor thing, and has enlisted all my sympathies. I am going to the end of the case for her, and I think I shall have a time of it, too. There are some things about it which I do not like. There has been foul play, and if I am not mistaken Jonas Jackson has fallen into the hands of some of the coolest rascals on top of ground."

The old lady, who had listened to the boy with the greatest of attention, asked:

"What is the reward, Dick?"

"Not a penny!" was the reply. "Janet is not able to offer any reward and, after hearing her story, I could not accept a dollar from her. I don't want any reward in this case. I made enough out of the last one. Let those pay who can. I am perfectly willing to serve pretty Janet Jackson for nothing."

"Certainly, Dick. I hope you will restore the father to his child in a short time. What do you have to commence on?"

"Very little, hardly anything I might say," responded Dick. "When Janet told me that her father probably reached New York at a

certain hour on a particular Thursday, I was reminded that very near that time I saw a certain man at the ferry who appeared to be watching for somebody."

"Ah!"

Dick nodded.

"And that certain person I nearly ran onto to-night," continued the boy. "He wasn't at the ferry this time."

"No?"

"He was up-town and not far from the house to which I had just escorted Janet. Don't I know him, though? Don't I know who his associates are, and that the three can't be excelled for meanness? If they had their deserts they'd all be behind the bars up the river, but the difficulty has been to prove anything on them. They're too slick—slicker than eels, Mammy Sturgeon."

The old lady looked at the boy ferret, but said nothing.

"Now, look here. You used to know Mrs. Gambray, the widow who married Sandy Spann the lawyer," Dick suddenly resumed.

"Is she in the case?"

"I have not said so. You used to know her?"

"Yes."

"And you used to visit her, didn't you?"

"Very often, Dick, but I haven't seen her since she married her present husband."

"Still you are friends?"

"I think I can say yes."

"Well, mother, I want you to visit her to-morrow. She resides at 666 O— street. You will put on your best bib-and-tucker, and resume old acquaintance to the best of your ability. But, while you are in the house you will keep your eyes open. You will see what little articles Mrs. Spann keeps about her, and you must find some excuse for asking the time of day. Go in the afternoon between two and four, for then Mr. Spann will be busily engaged fleecing somebody down-town. You will do all this? I know you will, and you'll do it royally, too."

Mother Sturgeon promised Dick that she would carry out his instructions to the letter, and the boy laughed over what he called sending a spy into the enemy's camp.

He again impressed on the old lady the importance of noting what kind of watch Mrs. Spann was carrying, and whether it had a bouquet engraved on the case.

"Now," said he, picking up the hat he had thrown upon the floor on coming in. "Now I am going out again."

"Again to-night, Dick?"

"I want to see Little Ajax, the Wonder."

"Dick," broke in Mrs. Sturgeon as seriously as before, "do you really put any faith in that person?"

The boy smiled.

"I don't know whether you ought to call it faith," answered he. "I take some stock in Ajax."

"Well, I do not, but I won't interfere."

With this the young detective went out, leaving the old woman alone.

He turned the first corner he came to and kept on toward the East River till he saw the reflection of a thousand lights on the dancing waves. Exciting thoughts crowded fast into the boy's mind. He remembered when he was a wharf rat, spending his days and nights along the river, picking up a trail here and another there. He was going back to his old haunts.

He kept straight on until he found himself near the end of the street that terminated at the pier.

All at once he turned into a large, old-fashioned frame-house, the front door of which stood wide open, and found himself in a hall with the outlines of a stairway before him.

Up these steps he ran, and on the landing above touched a button which he found in the wall.

Instantly there came from some unseen part of the house a sound like the far-away tinkle of a bell, and Dick disappeared.

Two minutes afterward he entered a room which was a veritable curiosity-shop. The walls were covered with pictures cut from the illustrated papers of the day, and the only furniture consisted of a square table, a cot and two chairs.

One of the chairs had padded arms, and was occupied when Dick entered.

"Here you are! I know your touch!" laughed a child voice, and in a moment Dick was leaning over the speaker, whose figure, shrunken and deformed, was much too small for the chair.

A pair of bright black eyes danced in the rather large head, and every now and then a hand, almost transparent in the gaslight, pushed

back a mass of dark hair which seemed determined to get over the forehead.

This was Little Ajax. He was barely eighteen, though he looked forty. He was one of the many wonders of New York, for he was said to have the gift of second sight by means of his hand.

"Well, Ajax," began Dick, dropping into the chair which was for the accommodation of the Wonder's patrons, "I am here as you say. How's your hand to-night?"

Ajax held the member between the boy detective and the light.

There did not seem to be a bone in it, and Dick thought he could have read a newspaper by looking through the palm.

"It is the same wonderful hand it has always been," declared Ajax. "What do you want to-night, Dick?"

"I want you to trace a man who is missing."

The deformed second-sight Wonder shook his head.

"Can't you do that, Ajax?" cried the boy.

"I can't do it twice the same night."

The Dodger gave Ajax a look of wonder.

"Do I startle you?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, know that I have once before since sundown traced a missing man for some one."

The young shadow eagerly leaned forward.

"Who was he, Ajax?"

"I can't name my customers," was the reply. "But, look at the face of the man in yon picture. It is exactly like his."

The Dodger went to the wall, where, for a moment, he gazed at a face in the medley of prints there.

"I know your customer," he suddenly announced. "You don't have to name him, Ajax. It was Titus Todd."

The Wonder did not reply.

CHAPTER IV.

THREE OF A KIND.

MR. TITUS TODD, the valued friend of Spick and Spann, attorneys, had more names than one. He was well known to the police, and more than once had been seen at the ferries and in the depots, eagerly scanning the faces and the make-up of the city's visitors.

He was decidedly a wolf in sheep's clothing, and a very sleek one at that. His tongue, to use an every-day expression, was "as smooth as oil," and he had a way of worming himself into the good graces of the unsuspecting that was nearly irresistible.

No very great crime had been tracked to Titus Todd's doors. On several occasions he had been made to disgorge some of his ill-gotten gains, and it was thought that a dread of prison kept him from trying his hand at the darker crimes.

Dick Sly knew him better than did the watchful police, though he had never caught him rising above petty offenses.

The boy shadow believed that he had a heart dark enough for anything, and his seeming connection with the notorious lawyers, whose constant duty was to find and to fleece, led him to think often of the hawk of the ferries.

The Dodger was right when he guessed that Little Ajax's visitor was this same Titus Todd.

If he could have been elsewhere when he was conducting Janet Jackson to Sergeant Trupp's house, he might have seen the hawk climb the stair, that led to Spick and Spann's office.

The front curtains had been closely drawn, and no one in the street could have seen a streak of light in the room.

He was welcomed by the legal sharps, who seemed to read on his countenance that he had something important to communicate.

"I've been to see him; I've just got back," began Titus, putting a fresh point on his mustaches.

"Been where?" asked the lawyers in one breath.

"To the Wonder's—to Little Ajax's. You know of him."

"Yes; that is, we know what we've seen in the papers," answered Spick. "But for the life o' me I don't see what would take you there."

"You don't, eh?" grinned Titus. "After all that's passed lately you don't see why I should go to Little Ajax's. Fan me with a feather!" and the ferry hawk placed his feet one across the other upon the table. "Well," he went on, relapsing into seriousness, "I went down there on business pertaining to the welfare of Messrs. Spick and Spann. Ajax can read his hand like a book. It is wonderful."

"Then, it is true?"

"Of course it is. What do you think he did for me, awhile ago?"

The two men shook their heads.

"He started from Cherry Vale in New Jersey and followed a man to New York. Wonderful gift I call that!"

Some color fled from Mr. Spick's face, but his partner exhibited no emotion.

"Well, what else, Titus?"

"Having seen the man land, he followed him from the ferry-house up-town, came with him into this very office, left it at his side, and—"

"That will do!" cried Stephen Spick. "In Satan's name, where did Little Ajax get this power?"

"I don't know, but I can say that he possesses it. He seems to see the scenes in his hand which appears transparent when he holds it before a light."

"Where does Ajax live?"

"What are you going to test him?" laughed Todd turning to the lawyer.

"Never mind. Give me the Wonder's address if you please."

Titus complied, giving Mr. Spick full directions for reaching the Wonder's house, and the lawyer made a mental note of it all.

"Don't you think Little Ajax knows too much?" asked Spick, his eyes glistening in the light.

"I'm not afraid of him. His gift is not known to a great many and they are not the sort of people we need care about."

"Do you think he suspected you?"

"No! Why should he?"

"But you've taken great pains to tell us that you've tested the Wonder."

Todd burst into a laugh.

"It was an admirable thing to test him with, eh?" he suggested. "Nothing could have been better."

"I don't like it," growled Spick, and he lost color at the lips. "Don't go back to the Wonder. It won't do. By the way, what have you heard?"

"You had better ask me what I've seen?"

The two lawyers started.

"Well, what have you seen?"

Titus leaned across the table and seemed to enjoy the anxiety depicted on the countenances before him.

"The girl has come after him!" was his answer.

"She has?" cried Sandy, but Spick made no reply.

"She is here. Came in on the same train that fetched her father."

"Is she pretty? He said she was, you know."

"She is very pretty."

The next question was a natural one.

"Where is she?"

"Now, isn't that a fine question for a married man?" smiled Titus pointing his mustache again.

"You seem to be greatly interested in Janet Jackson, the pretty bird from the Jerseys. Shall I tell Mrs. Spann, Spick?"

Stephen still said nothing. His lower jaw appeared to have dropped half an inch and there was a cold, stony look in his eyes.

"You haven't answered me yet," persisted Spann who had not taken his eyes from the hawk of the ferry.

"I can't. I don't know where the girl is."

"You mean you won't. I think I know you, Major Todd."

Titus showed his teeth in a smile, and left his chair.

"I'll see you later, gentlemen," he went on. "I have business elsewhere just now."

He was walking coolly toward the door, Sandy Spann watching him like a lynx.

"Let him go," whispered Spick, as his partner showed signs of getting up. "We can't afford it just now." And Titus passed from the office and went down to the street, chuckling to himself.

"Don't you see what he is doing?" demanded Spann, whirling upon his partner when Titus had vanished.

"Yes, he is playing a game of his own."

"More! He is playing *against* us!"

"He can't afford to do that."

Sandy looked into Stephen's eyes while he laughed derisively.

"There's no limit to such a man's deviltry," he exclaimed. "Of course we're all in the same boat, but what does he care for *that*? What business had he to go to Little Ajax with that test? Now suppose somebody else goes there on the same errand and discovers that Titus Todd has called?"

"My God!" ejaculated Stephen, falling back, and the following moment he started forward

like a jack-of-the-box. "You and I have to go to work," he continued. "If we do not, all we have may not be worth the chest that holds it."

The excited man sprung up and stood erect, as white as ashes.

"I used to be good for something else besides tricks of law," he resumed. "I can go back to other tricks which I have not forgotten. We must show this man that we are up to his designs. While I don't believe he will attempt to betray us in anything, he's *dangerous*. I wish we had never seen him."

"If we had not we would be poorer than we are by a good many thousands," responded Spann, coolly. "If the girl is here she can do but one one thing—acquaint the police with the fact that her father is missing. There will be a search, of course; the reporters will catch the item, and when all is over somebody will laugh at the detectives of New York."

"Some of them are very shrewd fellows; they unwind a good many tangled skeins."

"So they do; but here is one that will baffle all their skill."

Half an hour later the office of the legal sharps was quite deserted and dark.

It remained so until past midnight, when footsteps were patterning down the corridor to the door, and soon a dark figure was wriggling itself into the room through the transom.

CHAPTER V.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER.

At a certain hour the following afternoon the bell of a house on O— street was rung by a plainly-dressed woman, a little past middle life.

It was Mother Sturgeon.

Her ring was answered by a rather large woman of forty, who stared a moment at her visitor and then in cordial tones invited her in.

Mother Sturgeon played her part exceedingly well, as Dick had declared she would do, and when she arose to depart, she inquired the time of day, at the same moment glancing at the gold chain the lawyer's wife wore around her neck.

Without hesitation Mrs. Spann drew forth a beautiful little watch, and before opening it held it so that her caller could admire the case.

Mother Sturgeon's eyes seemed to get new light as she looked, but the watch soon disappeared and good-byes were exchanged.

Mrs. Spann was once more alone, but not for long.

Her husband came in before she could dismiss her visitor from her mind, and stepping quickly across the room, he caught her arm and looked her sternly in the eye.

"What was her name?" he demanded fiercely.

Mrs. Spann looked astonished.

"You know who I mean—your visitor, of course."

"That was an old acquaintance—Mrs. Nancy Sturgeon," she stammered. "What excites you?"

"I don't like to have my house invaded by spies!"

"Spies?" echoed Mrs. Spann suddenly losing color. "You don't class Mrs. Sturgeon with such people I hope!"

"Yes I do! She's the reputed mother of a boy ferret who is always watching people. She came here to-day for a purpose. The boy sent her, knowing that it would not do for him to come himself."

"But, what would he want to obtain here?"

"No difference what," returned the lawyer.

"Did she ask any curious questions?"

"No. She conducted herself with propriety. When she had obtained the time by my watch she took her departure."

"By your watch, eh?" exclaimed Spann, glancing at the stem of his wife's watch which was visible above the belt she wore.

"Yes. Why—"

"Never mind," he interrupted. "The next time that woman calls you will tell her at the door that you are not to be interviewed. Do you hear, madam? And, what is more, I prefer that you wear your *old* watch hereafter."

Mrs. Spann was about to inquire into the cause for all this caution, but her husband walked away and was heard to quit the house.

He was ill at ease.

He went down-town to the office, which he found untenanted.

An afternoon paper had been thrown into the office by way of the transom and lay on the floor.

As the lawyer picked it up with the intention

of placing it on the table, his eye caught sight of a paragraph that held his hand in check.

"What's all this?" he cried, dropping into a chair and reading on, and he did not appear to catch another breath till he had reached the end of the article which ran as follows:

"A FLOATER SOLVES A MYSTERY."

"At four o'clock this morning Patrol Boat No. 4 found a floater in the water at the foot of Old street. It was the body of a man apparently fifty years of age and had been in the water some days. At the morgue, where a close examination was had, the corpse was pretty certainly identified as that of Jonas Jackson, a merchant of Cherry Vale, New Jersey, who left home about three weeks ago with the intention of buying a stock of goods in this city. Miss Janet Jackson appeared at the Police Headquarters yesterday and reported her father's disappearance, besides leaving an accurate description of his person and clothing. It was deemed best not to let the young lady view the body, as it is not fit to be seen by one of delicate nerves, but the clothing identifies it to the satisfaction of the police. It is understood that Jackson had some ten thousand dollars on his person when he left home, and his appearance at the harbor as a floater leaves no doubt that a foul crime has been committed—one which the authorities should trace to the doors of the guilty."

Lawyer Spann did not look up till he reached the end of the startling paragraph, and when he laid the paper down his face held an expression impossible to describe.

A moment afterward he left the office, and went down to the street.

Three blocks away he nearly ran into the arms of a man, who stopped him suddenly and laughed in his face.

It was Titus Todd.

"The very man I want to see!" remarked the decoy, and before Sandy could ask any questions he led him into a house near by, and through it to a curtained and quiet room in the rear.

"Do you know what happened last night?" inquired Titus, with a grin on his face.

"I thought it was this morning," replied the lawyer, going back in his thoughts to the paragraph he had just read.

"No; it happened last night," the rogue went on, emphatically.

And then he leaned toward Spann and continued, slowly:

"Little Ajax, the Wonder, was murdered in his lodgings!"

Lawyer Spann fell back and looked blankly at his friend.

"You know I went to see the fellow early in the evening," Todd proceeded. "In order to test his powers, I got him to track Jonas Jackson for me, which he did with astonishing results. Well, at daylight this morning, a man who lives in another part of the same house entered the Wonder's room, and found him leaning back in his chair, stiff and dead, of course. To all appearances he had been dead some time, for the marks of the fatal choking he received were nearly gone."

"The choking?" repeated Sandy.

"Yes, for they say that the Wonder was pushed back into his chair and choked by two hands till life was extinct."

"Somebody had a grudge against him."

"He has seen too much in his transparent hand," answered the hawk of the ferry. "It is known that he had several visitors after my departure, so I won't be dragged into the affair. I've got notoriety enough now. Ha, ha!" laughed Titus. "But what was you thinking about when I began to speak of Little Ajax?"

"About the man found in the water this morning."

"What man?"

"The police call him Jonas Jackson."

"Ho! Do they? Found in the water did you say?"

"A floater. The corpse is now lying at the morgue."

The decoy drummed on the edge of the table with the tips of his fingers, and for a moment made no reply.

Mr. Spann thought that he knew more about the floater than he cared to divulge, but he kept his own counsel.

"Very well. Let the police have their opinion," said Titus at length. "These floaters never tell any stories, and they are soon forgotten. It seems to me, Sandy, that these two events form a combination of circumstances which certainly are not against our interests. Were you going home when I met you?"

The lawyer said that he was not, and all at once his thoughts recurred to his wife's afternoon visitor.

"You told me once, Titus, about a shrewd

boy who has become somewhat noted as a young ferret," he resumed.

"So I did; Dodger Dick is his street name."

"He has quarters with a woman, by some believed to be his mother?"

"She is, in reality, no blood relation at all," corrected the other. "But what of the two?"

"The woman called at my house this afternoon."

"Mother Sturgeon called at your house? What was she after?"

"She pretended to be making a friendly visit as she was an acquaintance of my wife before we were married."

"Oh!" cried Todd, though his exclamation had a doubtful meaning.

"What do you think the call really meant?" uneasily questioned the lawyer.

The ferry hawk shook his head.

"It may mean a good deal," was his answer.

"Mother Sturgeon, as I happen to know, is not very great on calls. She very rarely goes beyond the precincts of her own quarters."

"Don't you think the visit of yesterday needs looking into?"

"I will see," responded Titus.

"Is the boy really dangerous as a ferret?"

"He is pretty shrewd; but what if he is?" and the speaker's face grew stern. "You don't think, Sandy, that he is too much for all of us?"

"I wouldn't be Sandy Spann if I did," responded the lawyer, flushing. "I am glad that the police agree on the identity of the floater at the morgue."

"And Stephen, who growled about Little Ajax last night, will smile when he hears of his taking off. Don't you think so?"

Spann bowed, and in a short time the room was empty.

Five minutes later, when Titus Todd turned a street corner, he was seen by a boy who touched a man on the arm.

"That is one of the three," he whispered, looking after the ferry hawk. "I will keep him in sight till I run him down," and he started off after Titus.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BOY CLIENT.

MR. TITUS TODD did not seem to have the least idea that he was followed.

He walked rapidly, with Dodger Dick always near enough to keep him in sight, and after turning several corners he passed into a house which the boy recognized, with a smile.

Several times before he had tracked the hawk of the ferry to the same place, for it was his boarding-house, and where he was known under the name by which he has been introduced to the reader.

The street ferret waited an hour in a secluded spot when the front door of the house opened and a man came out who did not bear much resemblance to the person who had lately entered.

"New plumage, but the same old bird!" laughed Dick, critically examining the step of the man as he walked away. "You are up to something, Mr. Todd. Are you going to look at the person supposed to be Jonas Jackson, or do you intend to investigate the dark affair which occurred in the Wonder's room, last night? At any rate, I'll keep you on the string awhile longer."

This time the hawk sport was in no hurry.

His changed clothes fitted his shapely figure to a dot, and he sauntered about in them, quietly smoking the while, till he reached one of the public squares that swarmed with people.

Keen as he was, the Dodger nearly lost Titus at one time, but managed to track him hither and thither among the people till he dropped upon one of the benches alongside a person who appeared to be waiting for some one.

Dick drew as near as he dared, but could not make out the conversation between the two, for it was conducted in a very low tone.

"He could see, despite the lights and shadows that contended for possession of the Park under the electric lamps, that the ferry hawk's companion started on several occasions, and that Titus seemed to take infinite pleasure in the changes of color brought about by his words.

The two sat close together, and Dick would have given much if they had chosen some other place for their secrets.

Suddenly Titus's friend sprung to his feet.

"You won't do that, will you?" the boy ferret heard.

"Do you intend to try me?" was the answer.

"You know me, Stephen—"

"Hush! not that name here!" and the speaker threw a rapid look around.

Todd met the caution with a sarcastic grin.

"What do you say?" he asked decisively.

There was no answer, but Dodger Dick could see that the man seemed to be in Todd's power.

"Give me time," he pleaded. "Let me have till to-morrow."

"Take it," was the response. "I'm not hard on anybody. I will call on you at nine for an answer, and I shall expect it."

The man who turned from the ferry hawk came straight toward the young detective, and if he had not stepped aside there would have been a collision.

Dick's surprise, when he discovered that the fellow was Stephen Spick the lawyer, was so great, that he nearly uttered a cry as the man passed him.

"I think I can guess a part of the interview," thought the boy. "Titus Todd wants to make a raise, and as he has been Spick and Spann's go-between for years, he ought to know where the money is."

The Dodger left the ferry sharp to himself and followed the lawyer, whom he tracked to the stairway leading up to the office.

After awhile he stole up to the landing and rapped lightly on the door.

Stephen Spick was alone in the office with the door locked, but, in response to Dick's knock it was opened, and the boy spy walked in.

The vulture of the law looked surprisedly at his caller as he crossed the room and complacently dropped into a chair near the table.

Did Stephen know the young shadow?

"Is your door locked, Mr. Spick?" began the boy.

"What difference does that make?" demanded the lawyer, sharply.

"I don't like to transact very private business with prospects of interruption," smiled Dick. "My business with you is of that nature, and I wish it to be regarded so by yourself."

"Certainly," and Stephen locked the door. "Now, boy, what is it?"

"I am interested in some money which is tied up in a peculiar manner," began the visitor.

The word 'money,' and the fact that the person who spoke was a mere boy, seemed to electrify the vulture!—he scented prey!

"Before my father died," pursued the young Vidocq coolly, "he placed some money in the hands of a man in New Jersey. That person was, at one time, well off himself, but he made some bad investments and lost a good deal. He always said he was taking good care of my money, however. Well, a few weeks ago he concluded to put his last ten thousand dollars into a store, and with it in his pockets came to New York to lay in his stock. There's nothing strange in all this, sir, and if I could stop at the point I have reached I wouldn't be in this office at this hour bothering you."

Spick coughed as if to relieve himself; that he was excited was evident enough to the keen shadow.

"Now, here is the point, Mr. Spick," continued Dick, leaning on the table across which sat the wily man of the law. "That man—the holder of my money—has disappeared. No, I don't think he has, either, if the police are right. They say they have fished him out of the harbor, and he is now at the morgue without a sign of cash on his water-logged anatomy. Can I go over into Jersey and force his heirs, if he left any, to pay over the money which rightly belonged to me?"

Dick put the question so direct that it seemed to pierce Spick like an arrow.

"What is the man's name?" asked Stephen.

"Jonas Jackson. He lived at Cherry Vale, but now, if the police haven't made a mistake, he is temporarily at the dead-house."

"I thought you said the police are sure of his identity?" ventured the lawyer.

"So they are, but, these fellows sometimes pick up the wrong man. I understand that clothing found on the body brought about identification. There was no money, as I have already mentioned. I want my money. I am going to follow the thing to the end. Look here! If the man was murdered I will hunt the men who did it for the ten thousand dollars, and take my rights out of them!"

Stephen Spick glanced toward the door while he turned a trifle pale "about the gills."

"How much was coming to you?" he inquired.

"Oh," answered Dick falling back, "it wasn't enough to make a Vanderbilt of me. To a man who makes lots of money, as you do, it's hardly worth mentioning."

"But how much?" persisted the lawyer.

"Interest and all, I should think it would amount to—say fifty dollars."

A smile came at once to Spick's parchment-like features.

"You wouldn't make a fuss over *that* sum, would you?" he exclaimed.

"You wouldn't I know, Mr. Spick," said the boy. "But I stick up for my rights. I am willing to follow Jonas Jackson step by step from the time he left Cherry Vale till the wolves of New York closed in on him. I can do this readily because one of the best detectives in the world is my friend, and he would like this very case."

"But, what if you could obtain your money easily? You would not bother with the other matter, would you?"

"N—no," drawled Dick.

Stephen Spick appeared to reflect for a moment.

"I have a singular story to tell," he proceeded. "A number of days ago—I could tell exactly when by referring to my business diary—a man entered my office and after declaring himself to be Jonas Jackson, left a sum of money subject to his call. It amounted to exactly fifty dollars and is in my safe yonder in a large envelope. Now, my boy, as you say that there was that amount due you from Jonas Jackson, whom we will suppose with good reason perhaps, to be the dead man at the morgue, I think the law will justify me in paying you the amount."

The Dodger of course saw through the lawyer's scheme in a twinkling, but, all the same, was astounded at his audacity.

"Hold on, Mr. Spick," cried the boy, as Stephen was leaving his chair. "I can't touch that money. Though it is about the amount I claim, it was not left here for me."

"That is true, but I have no use for it. I don't like to have a dead man for my client."

"No? Well, then, I won't touch a dead man's money. I'll just set my detective friend on the trail," retorted the boy. "He never fails. I guess I'll be going, Mr. Spick."

In a moment the lawyer was on his feet and a tigerish gleam lit up his eyes as he threw a swift glance toward the door.

"Don't be in a hurry!" he said, threateningly.

Dick sprung up and pushed back his chair.

"Unlock that door!" the Dodger exclaimed. "Do it now, or I'll hang three men!"

CHAPTER VII.

CAUGHT.

THE threat thrown into his face by the boy detective with the look that accompanied, had an instant effect on the legal luminary. He turned pale like a person suddenly confronted with his guilt.

"You don't want to be too fresh," he exclaimed, recovering a little. "I see now that the story you have told about the fifty dollars is sham. There is something behind it, and I'll inform you here that you can't blackmail me!"

It required no effort on Dick's part for him to see that the lawyer spoke under fear. His lips actually trembled as the words came forth; but the passion of the man was such that he was liable to change front at any time and spring upon him like a tiger.

"Why should I attempt to blackmail you?" replied the boy. "You'll be accusing yourself next, Mr. Spick. I presume you'll unlock the door now, eh?"

"What will be your next move?" asked the law-sharp.

"I think I have already indicated."

"You are going to put your detective friend on the trail, are you?"

"Perhaps."

"Who is he?"

"No, my dear Mr. Spick," laughed Dick, desirously, stepping still further back. "You don't give all your secrets away, and you must not object if I keep some of mine. I have business of importance elsewhere, and if you will open the door—the key is in your hand, I see—I will not trouble you any longer."

The lawyer growled under his breath and went to the door which he sullenly unlocked.

As he opened it Dick, who was near enough, slipped out into the hall, and was beyond Stephen Spick's clutches.

He did not wait to bid the lawyer good-night, but started for the stair leading down to the sidewalk.

A minute afterward he was on the street, and glancing upward ere he hurried away, he saw a face at one of the second-story windows.

"Watching me, are you?" smiled the Dodger, contemplating the face. "You were a little too eager to pay me the fifty dollars, Mr. Spick. I have scored one point to-night. You want nobody on Jonas Jackson's trail, but you are

willing to silence any one who threatens to strike it."

The boy ferret went back to the spot where he had left the man when he started to follow Titus Todd. He found him in the same place, and the two at once adjourned to a secluded spot.

Dick gave an account of his interview with the lawyer, and his companion listened with a smile on his lips.

"Are you still of the old opinion about the man taken from the river?" Dick was asked.

"I am. I will not let Janet be shocked by the report of the find," he rejoined. "I admit that the clothes found on the body correspond with her description of those worn by her father; but I am going into this matter, believing that the Jersey merchant is somewhere else."

"Not at the morgue, eh?"

"Not there!" exclaimed Dick firmly.

He was looked at in silence for several seconds by his companion.

"I like your pluck, Dick," said he. "But, I am afraid the facts are against you."

"Well, I'll fight the battle whether they are or not. Now, let us go back. Stephen Spick is to be met by Titus Todd, at the law office, tomorrow, at nine o'clock. The hawk of the ferries has the lawyer in his clutches, and there will be a scene there. I want to witness it."

"But how can you?"

"I shall occupy the room directly overhead. It has been empty for some time, and there is a considerable crack in the ceiling of the wolves' den, as I have discovered. I shall attempt it, anyhow."

"If you should be caught, Dick—"

"I take the risk," interrupted the boy with a laugh. "Stephen Spick will try to be prepared for Titus, though I think the rascal is too much for him. It was amusing to see how suddenly the lawyer recollects that he had fifty dollars to give me, hoping that the sum would take me from the trail."

One hour later the young shadow entered Janet Jackson's presence, at the police officer's house.

From the girl had been kept all knowledge of the discovery by the harbor patrol, and she had not been permitted to see the papers that chronicled the event.

Dick told her that, as yet, nothing definite had been found out, and when she asked him pleadingly if there was not *some* hope he replied that he believed her father would soon be brought to light.

"How could you tell the child that story?" exclaimed the officer's wife, when Janet had returned to her sad quarters up-stairs and they were alone in the parlor. "My husband says that the force has given up the search for the merchant, but here you hold out to his child certain hopes which must be crushed soon."

"We will see," Dick replied. "I know nearly everybody is against us. To-morrow will either throw new light on the mystery or make it darker. Janet's friend is here."

"Her friend?"

"Yes, a young man who lives between Cherry Vale and the city."

"What does he know?"

"Not very much, but he happened to pick up a piece of information the other day, and I am now following it up. Don't tell Janet that he is here."

"I shall not."

When Dick left the house he went direct to the Square where he had witnessed the interview between Titus Todd and Stephen Spick.

There he saw a man standing in the light. There was a singular familiarity about the figure, and on approaching Dick recognized Sandy Spann of the law firm.

He was surprised to behold the fellow at such time and place, and while the boy watched he saw him joined by Titus Todd.

The two conversed together in low tones for awhile and then separated, Titus moving off in one direction and the lawyer in another.

Dick did not follow.

By and by he was joined by a young man of twenty whom he greeted in a friendly manner and the two took the most secluded seat to be found in the Square.

Dick's companion was the person of whom he had spoken to the officer's wife as Janet's friend, and the couple had met in the Park by appointment.

"I have found out one new thing," began Dick's comrade. "It may have a bearing on our case, after all. The lawyer, Stephen Spick, exchanged a little toilet case at the Broadway Exchange this morning."

"Ha!" cried the boy detective. "You are sure it was Stephen, Mr. Gray?"

"There can be no mistake," was the prompt rejoinder, "I came away with it, by purchase. You know that Mr. Jackson, when he left home, promised to get Janet a toilet case of a certain kind, which she described exactly from one she had seen, and the one I have fits the description to a dot. I consider that a step."

"You are right. It is an important step!" exclaimed Dick. "Who told you that Stephen Spick exchanged the toilet case?"

"The clerk who sold it to me. He happened to be the one who had dealt with the lawyer, and he remarked, with a smile, that he supposed Stephen had received it from some client in part payment of a fee."

The couple walked away together, Dick thinking about the incident of the toilet case.

Janet had given him a description of the articles which she had asked her father to purchase, and among them was a toilet case like the one her friend had secured at the store where articles not wanted by their possessors could be exchanged for others more to their liking.

"It is clear to me that Jonas Jackson fell into the hands of the three sharks," he remarked to Gerald Gray, his companion, ere they separated. "Sandy Spann took the lady's watch which the merchant bought for Janet, and Mother Sturgeon has had a peep at it, and Stephen Spick took the toilet case. Titus Todd took all his share in money, no doubt. Was there ever such an infamous plot against a man? We are getting well along on the trail, Mr. Gray. Meet me to-morrow at eleven to hear the report of the scene at the office."

Dodger Dick turned toward home after leaving Janet's lover.

He was making headway in the most important case of his life, and his fingers itched to close on the rascals who had combined to rob a man of ten thousand dollars if not to take his life.

"Say, you, there! Hold on a minute!" cried a voice behind Dick.

The boy could not believe that the words were addressed to him; but when they were repeated in part and nearer he looked over his shoulder.

"I've stopped you, have I?" said a man who stepped up, and the young detective caught the demon-like gleam that filled the eyes before him. "I want to see you. Come with me. No excuses; no noise."

At the same moment a hand closed like a vise of steel upon Dick's arm.

He drew back, but the grip tightened.

"Call for the police, and you'll be dead when they arrive," continued the man.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DODGER IN DURANCE.

FOR the Dodger to look up into the face that bent over him was to see that he had been captured by the ferry hawk, Titus Todd.

The cunning sport had come upon him at a spot where everything was favorable for his scheme, and Dick was fast in the villain's clutches.

He was hurried off with the threat which closes the last chapter ringing in his ears. It was a useless threat on the sport's part, for the young detective had no thought of calling the police. He had been caught before, and his good luck and shrewdness had gotten him out of the traps. Whether the same fortune would attend him on the present occasion, or whether he was destined to be unlucky, he did not know, but he had resolved to risk it without the aid of any one.

Dodger Dick was escorted over the sidewalk at a rapid gait, and when the hand was removed from his arm he found himself standing against the wall, looking into the triumphant face of the man who had brought him to the place.

They had entered a house which was not far from the river, and the room had all the appearances of a prison cell.

It was a cramped place with one window, which was protected by a network of iron bars. The ceiling was high, and of a dull, smoky color, and the walls were smooth and dark.

Titus Todd looked at the boy for some moments in silence.

"You know what this is for," he suddenly exclaimed. "You are entirely too meddlesome for your age. A fellow never gets into trouble so long as he attends to his own business. This is not Mother Sturgeon's parlor, nor is it the room where you are wont to hold interviews with Janet Jackson. But you can make yourself at home here with a little effort. You've been in

traps before to-night, though never in one of my making. Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a laugh full of malignity and did not strike Dick's ears very pleasantly, though his reply was not such as to further anger the hawk of the ferry.

"I am no growler, Titus Todd," answered he. "My life motto has been: 'Take events as they come,' and as this is one of the number, I submit."

"By Jove! that's sensible!" exclaimed the boy's captor. "You carry a man's head on your shoulders, and that's why you're dangerous, you know."

With this the speaker gave Dick a final look and left the room, leaving a gas-jet to afford the young prisoner all the light he wanted.

For some time Dick stood immovable with the solid wall at his back.

He had plenty of time for reflection, and he put it to good use.

He remembered his plans for the morrow—that he was to take possession of the vacant room over Spick and Spann's office for the purpose of overhearing the interview between the ferry hawk and Stephen Spick; but here he was, the prisoner of the deepest villain of the set, and not at all likely to carry out his designs.

After awhile the boy spotter went to the door and tried it, but of course it was locked, and his eager listening resulted in nothing.

He wondered what had become of Titus Todd. Had he gone to acquaint his associates with his good luck, or, as he seemed to know where Janet was, was he about to play a hand against her?

If Dick could have followed the hawk of the ferries he would have tracked him by a good many turnings to Officer Tom Trupp's house.

Titus mounted the steps with a smile of complacency on his face, and his gloved hand rung the bell a little nervously.

It was rather late for a call, but the fellow had plans made up and knew just what he was doing.

Officer Trupp was on duty at the station, and Titus expected to find only the woman occupant of the house at home.

His ring was soon responded to by footsteps in the hall, and the door was opened. Mrs. Trupp made her appearance. Beyond her, with anxiety and eagerness depicted on her countenance, stood a young girl, and her position rendered it impossible for her to escape the keen eyes of the sharp.

He saw her at once and knew that she was Janet, the merchant's daughter.

"My name is Dubois, madam," said Titus, touching his hat. "I am a private detective who may have some important information for the young lady here."

He spoke in tones intended for ears other than Mrs. Trupp's, and the response was a light cry as Janet sprung forward.

"I am here myself!" she cried, before the officer's wife could interpose. "What do you know about my father? They have discovered nothing as yet, but your words have thrilled me, and my heart again beats with hope."

All this time Titus had his eyes riveted upon the girl.

Her beauty seemed to have fascinated him, and it was as if he had forgotten his errand.

"I am glad I inspire you with hope," he continued at length, and Janet came closer and stood within a few feet of him. "Your father may not long be missing, and I wish to say that good work is being done in your behalf though you know it not."

"I thank you!" broke forth the overjoyed girl. "Won't you come in and tell me all about it?"

Titus glanced at Mrs. Trupp.

She stood before him with the immobility of a statue, her eyes with a repellent look in their depths fixed steadily upon him, and well he knew that she did not more than half believe his story.

"I want to hear him," proceeded Janet touching Mrs. Trupp's sleeve. "You will let the gentleman come in and tell me what he knows, won't you?"

It was next to impossible to resist the pleading tones in which these words were couched, and the officer's wife, who knew of the finding of the corpse in the water and who shared with her husband the general opinion that prevailed, found herself in a singular dilemma.

All at once she stepped aside and said, addressing Janet:

"I cannot object when you plead. But I want to warn you beforehand not to put too much reliance on what you hear about—about your father, child."

The ferry hawk gave Mrs. Trupp a look full of daggers, but smothered his rage, and soon found himself face to face with Janet in the parlor.

A light was already burning there.

The missing merchant's daughter did not take a chair, but stood in her eagerness, waiting breathless as he could see for the revelation he was expected to make.

"You are a detective," she said, unable to curb her eagerness any longer. "You have something to impart about my father. Do not keep me waiting, sir. You do not know a daughter's heart. He is not dead! No, I will not believe it."

"I am not a prophet of evil, miss," rejoined Titus. "They do you an injury who would prepare you for tidings of his death. All men who turn up missing in this great city are not the victims of crime."

"You encourage me!" cried Janet, clasping her hands.

"I am glad of that. I work independently of the detectives who tread in beaten paths, and who never get out of them. I find people when all others fail, but before I proceed please give me a history of yourself."

Janet wondered why this was necessary, but she did not hesitate to do so.

She went back over her uneventful life, depicted the home in Jersey, and told the hawk of the ferries all she knew.

Her father had once been worth a good deal, but certain bad investments had taken his wealth until but ten thousand dollars remained.

"What became of his brother in the South?" suddenly asked Titus.

"What have you heard of him?" exclaimed Janet.

"He had a brother there, had he not?"

"Yes. That brother was very wealthy once, but we learned that the war impoverished him, and that he died a pauper. He was father's only brother, but I cannot see how he enters into the mystery of father's disappearance."

"He may not, but I merely mention the matter because, in my investigation, I happened to discover the relationship. Now, miss, I have the pleasure of informing you that the clouds of gloom may soon be dissipated."

"Thank Heaven!" cried Janet, springing forward. "You are indeed a messenger of gladness. Not dead! will be found soon! I wish I could find words to thank you, Mr. Dubois."

"No thanks. I am only too glad to be of service to you," smiled Titus. "I shall not abate my efforts in your behalf, for I am deeply interested in your case."

Janet was about to reply, when the parlor-door opened and a man entered, backed by Mrs. Trupp, whose eyes were full of victory.

Titus started a little when he saw the pair.

"Good-evening, Mr. Todd," spoke the gentleman, sarcastically, as he advanced. "You will accompany me, if you please. The young lady here will excuse you."

Janet looked nonplussed and glanced toward Mrs. Trupp for an explanation, when that woman stepped toward her and said, in a voice that reached Todd's ears:

"Our caller, my child, forgot that there are telephones in New York."

And then the ferry hawk was marched off, with a scowl on his face!

CHAPTER IX.

THE RAT GNAWS OUT.

MRS. TRUPP, who was a shrewd little woman and who, no doubt, was acting on the advice of her husband, had stepped quietly to a back room where there was a telephone-box, and had called up the Mulberry street police building, where her husband was on duty.

Her next move was to send over the wire a complete description of the man then in the parlor with Janet, and the result was the one just witnessed.

Officer Tom Trupp came to the rescue in person, and Titus Todd found himself taken in on the charge of impersonating an officer.

At first he refused to say anything; but before he reached the station he became bold, and said he would make the authorities pay dearly for the arrest.

Officer Trupp smiled but said nothing.

"I'm in a pickle, sure enough, and must use my wits to get out," thought Titus, who did not like the situation at all.

He thought of the young prisoner he had just landed in the strange house, and also of the promised interview with Stephen Spick at the law office.

"There may be more back of this arrest than one thinks," he went on, and he could think at

his leisure in the cell where he had been placed.

"What if the boy got in some of his sharp work before I nabbed him? But I have him safe out of the way anyhow, and I guess I'm keen enough to get out of here with but a slight singeing."

He had admitted that he was Titus Todd, for to have done otherwise, when he was so well known to the police, would have been an exhibition of folly; but he declared that his object in calling on Janet Jackson was to obtain some information which he intended to use in his search for her father.

He pretended to believe that a reward had been offered for the discovery of the Jersey merchant, and when he was asked by one of the police if he did not know that the missing man had been found in the river, he affected great surprise.

Titus was a fox.

"What do you think of him?" asked the inspector when he and Officer Trupp had come from a tilt with the prisoner.

"He is playing a game," was the reply. "I wish Dodger Dick would drop in. We would probably have a little new light thrown on the matter, for the boy has been giving Titus some attention the last few days, and I believe the work has not been entirely barren of results."

"Where is the boy?"

"I cannot say, but he is liable to drop in at any time. He gave me to understand when I saw him last that he would come round to-night, and I look for him."

The inspector looked at his watch and walked to his desk.

But, Dick the Dodger did not come.

We left him, as the reader will remember, in the cramped apartment of the strange house near the river, and he was still an inmate of the place.

Several hours had passed since his capture by the hawk of the ferries, and he seemed to be as safe in that room as though the walls and doors were of iron.

The gas-jet which burned so near the wall that the flame blackened it showed him his cheerless surroundings. He inspected them carefully and was about to conclude that once again he was hopelessly immured when his eye caught sight of the outlines of a trap-door in one corner of the lofty ceiling.

He ran to the gas and standing on tiptoe turned it on in full brilliancy, then looked up again to confirm his discovery.

But how to reach the trap, was the question. And whither did it lead?

Dodger Dick looked up with yearning, like the fox, with the grapes hanging just beyond his reach.

The one chair in the room would not afford him any assistance, and there was no bedstead to be placed on end.

How hard was the wall?

A moment after this thought, the boy detective was attacking the hard plaster with his heavy pocket knife.

At first the blade seemed to make no impression, but after he had worked awhile he saw that a niche was being formed, and his hopes took courage.

He cut two niches in the wall side by side, then above these he cut two more.

Beyond the coating of plaster he found lathes that aided him in obtaining foot and finger hold.

Dick worked as he had never worked before.

At last, with his feet inserted into the lower niches and with one hand in one of the higher ones, he worked clear of the floor and above the chair.

His knife blade began to show symptoms of wear, and Dick eyed it with evil forebodings. Still he was gradually approaching the trap-door, the goal of his ambition, and, as he fondly thought, the gateway to freedom.

Hatless and coatless the boy ferret worked his way upward, stopping now and then to catch new breath or to gain another or a higher footing.

He was two hours more getting to the top, and when he put up his hand and touched the trap he found it as solid as the door!

This was a disappointment that sunk deep into the Dodger's heart, but, he did not go down over his strange ladder and give up to despair.

He cut a higher niche for his hands, and then pressed the trap with all his might.

Suddenly something yielded; the middle of the trap-door gave way, and the boy spotter's head bobbed up into dense darkness.

For the moment he was on the eve of losing his hold and falling to the floor, but he managed to obtain a new grip before he could drop, and

in a second he had drawn himself up into—he knew not where.

The Dodger knew that he had worked his way into a loft as unknown to him as the forests of Africa. He could not see his hand before his face, and could only wonder whether the garret had more than one outlet.

Before long he was in the dark place which appeared to be as barren of furniture as the room he had just left.

It was certainly a crawl in the dark.

Dick considered that he was taking great risks in exploring the garret when the ferry hawk was likely to return to the room underneath, but the truth was, though he knew it not, that Titus was languishing at the station and racking his brain over plans for escape.

The young Vidocq argued that the dark place had more than the one discovered outlet, and it was the other one for which he was diligently searching.

He found, when he was about to give up the search and go back to his prison, a covering which seemed to be another trap.

His hands confirmed the importance of the find, and lifting the board, which yielded more readily than the other had done, he looked down into stygian gloom.

But Dick now had means for safe descent, for he had discovered a quantity of refuse, and among it a remnant of a windlass rope, whose strength he determined to test.

Making one end of the line fast to one of the rafters overhead, he lowered the rope into the darkness and fearlessly swung himself into space.

Dick had no idea to what depths he was descending, but, by dropping down, hand over hand, he soon struck a floor.

He was in an empty room, which confirmed his opinion that the house to which he had been brought was a vacant storage warehouse.

A short search found a door.

It was not locked, and Dick did not hesitate to open it.

In another minute he had passed from the room into one equally as dark, and then he crossed it with great eagerness.

Another door barred his way and checked his progress, for it was locked.

Just then he heard voices and footsteps beyond the threshold.

The next sound Dick heard was a startling one. A key was in the lock!

A thought which thrilled him passed through his mind.

He had left his shoes behind when he began to climb the niche-ladder in the wall, and his stocking feet made no noise.

Dick planted himself at the door and waited.

"It is the last door between me and the street," thought the brave lad. "When it opens, I bounce out, live or die!"

He did not have to wait long for the door to open, for the parties beyond seemed as eager to get in as he was anxious to get out.

The door opened rather suddenly.

"Walk in, Philip," said a man's voice. "The old house welcomes us, and no cops will look for us here."

The Dodger waited to hear no more.

With the nimbleness of a cat he sprung across the threshold, and so noiseless was his exit that no cry was raised.

In an instant Dick was running away, and, a minute later, as he turned a corner in a full blaze of gaslight, he was seized by the arm and jerked nearly off his feet.

He uttered a cry which he could not keep back, and looking at his captor he saw young Gerald Gray, Janet's friend and lover.

CHAPTER X.

PLAYING IT FINE.

"You run as though you had a blood-hound at your heels?" exclaimed Gerald.

"I don't know but that I have," was the response, and then Dick quietly narrated his escape from the house near the river.

Janet's friend listened with much interest to the story, and when it was finished he informed the boy ferret that he had just been tracking Sandy Spann the lawyer, who, after a series of puzzling movements had given him the slip.

Dick was certain that the old storage house from which he had escaped was a sort of occasional rendezvous for thieves, and that he owed his liberty to two of that character.

"What are you going to do next?" inquired Gerald.

"I want to witness the interview which takes place between Titus Todd and Stephen Spick at nine to-morrow. In order to do so, I shall take possession of the empty room above the office to-

night, as in doing so to-morrow I might be seen. I can catch sleep enough to make me bright for the adventure. Meanwhile," he added quickly, before Gerald could speak, "if you will look after Mr. Spann who is a sleek fellow you will be doing the cause a service."

"If Titus Todd discovers your escape he will be looking after you," Janet's lover suggested.

"Certainly. But, certain things have convinced me that he did not intend to return to the old house for some time, and I should not be surprised if he had abandoned me to my fate."

Without going to Mother Sturgeon's to acquaint her with the piece of business he had in hand, Dick the Dodger went almost directly to the building occupied in part by Messrs. Spick and Spann, law sharks.

He ascended to the floor above the office, opened a door which was not locked, and closed it as softly, slipping a catch on the inside.

Dick soon found that he had the room to himself as he had had his late prison, but he was no longer the captive of the ferry hawk, and could go where he pleased.

There was an excuse for a cot in one corner of the room, which to all appearance had not been used for some time, and not long after the boy had thrown himself upon it, he fell asleep.

He slept for some time soundly and undisturbed, but all of a sudden he found himself wide awake with darkness around him.

He was not long discovering that voices were coming up from below, and with quick intuition, he crept to the break in the floor which he expected to put to use the following day.

At first he saw nothing, but soon he noticed the familiar figures of the two lawyers in the room below.

For Dick to see the twin rascals in the office at that hour, he knew it must be late, was to divine that some villainy was afoot, and he resolved to let nothing escape him.

Stephen Spick was writing at the table in the middle of the room, and his partner was eying him with a good deal of interest.

"Are you sure you left no clew behind?" suddenly asked Spann, and the pen nearly fell from Stephen's fingers as he started and looked up, displaying a face that was deathly pale.

"Am I sure I left no clew where?" he demanded with wolfish ferocity. "What do you mean?"

A grim smile settled on Sandy Spann's face as he leaned toward his partner.

"Well, I mean your visit to the Wonder."

Spick gasped and looked at the man who had spoken.

"The Wonder is dead!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, yes," answered Sandy, his malicious smile getting broader. "I know he is dead. He was found in his chair, choked to death, and that's why I asked you if you're certain you left no clew behind."

The looks that passed between the two men cannot be described. For a moment they eyed each other like well-matched tigers, and Dodger Dick thoroughly enjoyed the scene.

Finally Stephen Spick found his tongue.

"You talk out of cover," said he. "Do you mean to insinuate that I know anything about Little Ajax's sudden going out of the world?"

He pushed back his chair and looked resentfully across the table, but met a pair of eyes as hard, cold and fearless as his own.

"You know who might profit by the Wonder's death," resumed Spann coolly. "You are aware that the gifted man looked into his wonderful hand for Titus Todd and traced Jonas Jackson from the time of his departure from Cherry Vale to—perhaps to the very moment of his death. I saw by your eyes when Titus was relating the circumstances that you regarded the Wonder as a very dangerous man. You left the office in that frame of mind."

"What if I did?" cried Stephen. "Because the Wonder happened to die shortly afterward must you accuse me?"

This was direct.

Sandy Spann ran his fingers into one of his vest pockets and fetched forth something which he laid on the table in full view of his friend.

Stephen Spick's color went again when his eyes fell upon the object, and Sandy said to himself: "Ha, ha! I thought so!"

The article taken from the lawyer's pocket was an ordinary gold ring, and the two men looked from it to each other and then back to the ring again.

"Where did you get it?" asked Stephen at length.

"I found it under the table near which the Wonder was discovered, dead," and the speaker looked his opponent squarely in the face. "It is your ring, Stephen?"

"It is."

"After this do you deny being at the Wonder's rooms last night?"

"I went there to test his powers."

Sandy Spann threw back his head and let a laugh ripple over his lips.

"Take it," said he suddenly pushing the ring across the table. "You may consider yourself lucky. That ring is well known in the police court, and if it had been found where I picked it up by any one of the numerous detectives of New York you might not be here now. The next time you play a secret hand you want to be sure that you came away with all you took there."

Stephen took the ring with the color of life still absent from his face, and keen-eyed Dodger Dick could see that his hand trembled when he put it away.

His eyes went back to the document he was writing at when his partner interrupted him, but instead of resuming his work, he folded it and dropped it into a drawer in the table.

"Now, Stephen, what do you think about the dead man at the morgue?" suddenly asked single-faced Sandy Spann, as if he took great delight in torturing the man he addressed.

"What is there to be thought about him, I'd like to know?" he replied. "He is dead enough if he is at the morgue."

"But is Jonas Jackson there?"

The manner in which Sandy put this question seemed to perplex Stephen not a little.

"What! don't you think he is?" blurted he.

"Do you?"

"Great Scott! man, what do the papers say?"

"And you might add: 'what do the police believe?'" smiled Sandy.

Stephen did not know what to make out of his partner's language.

"You mystify me," remarked he, going back to his old uneasiness. "You talk as if you doubt that the Jersey merchant was fished from the water by the harbor patrol."

"I do doubt it," retorted Sandy, and then he leaned suddenly across the table and continued in lower tones:

"It wouldn't be the first case the police have had of misidentification. I would feel easier than I do if the man called Jonas Jackson was the merchant of Cherry Vale, and not somebody else as I believe he is. I have been to the morgue myself. I have carefully inspected the clothing found on the body taken from the river, and while it tallies well with the description of the merchant's, as given by Janet, his daughter, I am not satisfied. There have been stranger cases than this one, Stephen."

"What does Titus say?" demanded Mr. Spick.

"Ah! there's the rub!" cried Sandy, falling back again and studying his partner for a moment. "That man is as cool as fate itself."

"Yes, and if we let him go on he'll have us wound up so tight that there'll be no escape without actual beggary!" exclaimed Stephen striking the table with his clinched hand. "If the body at the morgue is not Jonas Jackson, what has become of the man?"

"Ask Titus Toda."

"Ask him? No! Follow him! We know where the first stopping-place was. We can investigate that."

"A good idea."

"If it gives us no clew we can go to the next one," continued Stephen. "Don't you see what this man can do?"

The old smile, so like a fox's grin, came back to Sandy Spann's face.

"I see it all, Stephen," said he. "We are not safe till the trail is completely covered. We've got to keep a tight grip on what we have, and if Titus Todd shows us one of his cards we must break the force of his hand. He sees a fortune in Janet, and to reach his ends he will not hesitate to throw open to us the iron doors up the river!"

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR LINK.

As may be supposed the picking up of this important conversation was highly gratifying to the Dodger.

He did not let a single word escape him, and when the talk ended he prepared to follow the two men who left the office together.

Down on the street he soon caught sight of them, and when they started off, they had the ardent Dodger at their heels.

Spick and Spann did not seem willing to trust themselves to the light of the street cars, for they hurried along toward the East River avoiding as many people as possible.

Their figures were so well known to Dick that he had no trouble in keeping them in sight, and

when they dodged suddenly down a flight of basement steps he drew off a little fearing for a moment that they had discovered him and were preparing an ambush.

When he drew near, however, he found that they had entered the house from below, and there was no trace of the rascally pair.

Satisfied that they would soon emerge, the young Vidocq watched the house, and was rewarded by their reappearance.

They started off again and entered a second house in a similar manner some distance from the first.

Were they following the trail of Jonas Jackson from the time of his arrival in New York?

At last they reached a building whose door would not yield to them.

It was a brick house with an alley alongside, and a cheerless looking place besides. It had no basement entrance, and the key which Stephen Spick inserted in the front door failed to open it.

The two lawyers drew off for whispered consultation, and Dick wondered what would be their next move.

"Come!" he heard Sandy say, impatiently. "We can do nothing to-night. I'll get into the house in time to see what it holds. To-morrow you have an appointment with Titus, and you must hold him level."

Away went the legal sharks, watched out of sight by Dodger Dick, who did not follow, as he had made up his mind to get in where they had failed to enter.

When the coast seemed clear, he approached the dwelling, which did not appear to be inhabited. It was dark and silent within and without, and Dick tried the back entrances without satisfactory results.

Baffled for once in his life, he came out of the alley.

"Can't you get in?" said a voice so near that he wheeled with a start.

A thick-set man was looking at him from a few feet away, and Dick saw by the light afforded by the lamp on the nearest corner, that there was a comical leer on his face.

"You don't live there, eh?" continued the man, with a glance at the house.

"What if I do not?" was the response.

"That's easily answered; you don't."

"Then, perhaps, you know who does."

The bony man drew back a step and eyed Dick suspiciously for several moments.

"I guess it's empty now, though it's had some odd tenants in its time," said he. "My name is Bob White. What's yours?"

The question was so abruptly put, and with such a funny leer that Dick for a moment doubted the man's sanity.

"You ain't as free with your name as I am with mine," Bob White went on as Dick hesitated. "I could tell you a good deal about that old house if you'd make it interesting."

"How interesting?" asked the boy spotter.

"You're a city chap, and you ought to know. Let's take a walk."

Dick did not hesitate, but joined the man, and the two went off together.

He was conducted round the nearest corner to a ramshackle frame house, which Bob White entered, and then went up to the second floor, and to a room in the back part.

There he turned on the gas, and with it at its full, looked closely at Dick for a few moments.

"I know you," he suddenly cried. "Why didn't I catch on before we got here? I ought to give your neck a twist like that." And he snapped his thumb and finger in a peculiar manner.

The Dodger eyed the man, trying to think where they had met before, but he could not.

"You landed me once," suddenly resumed Bob White. "It wasn't for much, and they didn't hold me very long. Mebbe I ought to thank you, instead o' twisting your neck, for, while I was up, the other boys fell into the hands of the cops, and haven't come back yet. You haven't forgot the stolen molasses of Pier Twenty-nine."

Like a flash the whole circumstance of one of his past exploits came back to the young detective.

"I see. It's all with you again," resumed Bob White. "I'm the fellow you had nabbed then, but we didn't come here to talk about that, did we? I won't twist your neck to-night, and I won't thank you, either. We'll call it a stand-off, Dodger Dick. The old house round the corner, eh? Yes, we'll come back to it."

There were two poor chairs in the room, and Dick took one as Bob White deposited himself on the other.

The man was a petty harbor thief, a member

of a gang at that time doing the State some service behind iron bars.

He was no better than they, but as he was in prison himself when the rest fell into the clutches of the law, he had escaped the general sentence.

"See here, Dodger Dick, I'm not in the Vanderbilt business just now," laughed Bob White turning his pockets inside out as he spoke. "You know why I want you to make it a little interesting for what I'm going to tell about the old house. You understand, eh?"

The young detective had but little money with him at the time, but the sight of two silver dollars which he fished from his pocket and rather prominently displayed opened Bob White's eyes, and promised to put a rapid movement to his tongue.

"There's nothing small about you, my boy!" smiled the harbor thief. "And I'll postpone the twisting of your neck, to which postponement I presume you have no objection. I know the old house as well as I know any one in New York."

Dick said nothing, knowing that he would proceed and he was willing to let him have his own way.

"It's had many tenants in its time," Bob White went on. "I don't know who was the last one, and, for that matter, I don't care. I was once two days in its underground crypt. Ah! you've never heard o' that, I see."

The Dodger wondered whether his look had betrayed him, from the crook's last remark, but he was not permitted to speak before Bob resumed:

"These old places near the river have strange secrets, Dodger. Yes, I was two whole days in the crypt, and I'd be there yet if one o' the boys hadn't opened it, not knowin' I was there. The crypt's under the floor of the East room. It is as dark as Egypt, and so built that a man might exhaust his lungs in it and not be heard on the outside."

"Who built the crypt?"

"I don't know, and I never tried to find out. We used to use it when we were working the wharves in this vicinity; but as the trade has dropped further down the river, I don't mind giving the old place away."

And the man fixed his eyes on the shining dollars in Dick's hand.

"Do you want to look into the crypt?" he asked, with hardly a breath between his last sentence and the next. "You can't hurt me if you do, for I've nothing to do with it any more. Well, you go to the southwest corner of the East room. If you have a light you will find a peculiar-looking nail-head in the floor; if you have none you can find it by feeling. Press it firmly with your boot-heel, and a bolt which you cannot see will slide to one side. Then you will find a crack in the floor where none appeared before, and the trap-door can be raised. I went down into the place once, the door dropped into its place accidentally, and there I was sealed up solid in the dark! We used the crypt for our junk-room, but it has been used for other purposes: the walls say so."

There was no hidden meaning to the last sentence, and it seemed to send a chill of horror along the young ferret's bones.

"You couldn't get into the house to-night? Well, you didn't know how," observed Bob White, crossing the room and taking a key from a box which he found under the cot in one corner. "Here, try this in the back-door. I think this is what you lacked."

And the key fell into Dick's lap, and was snatched up with eagerness.

In exchange for the key and the story the boy tossed the silver dollars to Bob White who remarked as he caught them, that he wouldn't think of ringing his (Dick's) neck any more.

The young ferret was anxious to be off. He believed that the crypt held in its dark embrace the solution of a deep mystery of the metropolis. As Spick and Spann had tried to get into the old house it could not be otherwise.

Half an hour afterward Dodger Dick was on the street once more, the key obtained from the harbor crook burning his pocket, and firm in the belief that he was about to solve the mystery of Jason Jackson.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FERRY HAWK'S CAPTIVE.

MEANTIME a shrewd gentleman with whom the reader is somewhat acquainted was playing a cool game elsewhere.

Let us look after him.

It was not Titus Todd's intention to remain under arrest a moment longer than he could possibly help.

He knew that an investigation might fasten

a very serious crime on him, and he had barely entered the station-house ere he was planning an escape.

This was easier planned than accomplished, but the ferry hawk thought himself equal to the emergency.

When he found that the charge against him was impersonating an officer as he had done to Mrs. Trupp as well as to Janet, he began to make overtures to the authorities.

He was ready to promise anything, and even went so far as to say that he would quit the city never to return if he was released.

Officer Trupp was for holding the rascal till Dodger Dick should report, but as the night wore on and the boy did not come, Titus proposition was seriously considered.

"What do you think?" the lieutenant in charge of the business asked Trupp near twelve o'clock. "You say you don't want your wife dragged into a police trial with a ferry vulture like this?"

"Indeed, I do not," was the quick response.

"Then, why not take his oath and let him out?"

"Do you think you can get his oath to the effect that he will leave the city?"

"He has offered it."

"If he would go away it would be an excellent riddance. But I would like to hear from Dick first."

"To-morrow may be too late. If Titus Todd is in our hands then we will have to commit him for trial."

Officer Trupp thought again of his wife and Janet and yielded.

The cool rascal could hardly conceal his delight when it was announced that he would be taken at his bargain, and permitted to go scot free if he would seal his promise to quit the city with an oath.

This, and even more, he was ready to do, so without further ceremony he was brought from the cell and had the full conditions of his release named to him.

With unblushing effrontery the sharp of the ferries swore to leave the city without delay, and then walked out of the station a free man.

"They don't hold an eel very long!" laughed he. "I was willing to do nearly anything to get out of the sweat-box. I saw at once that Trupp was not going to let his wife appear as a police court witness, and I worked my cards accordingly. Now that I'm out, I'll see that I don't get back very soon, but I would like to pay Mrs. Trupp for that little telephone trick of hers. It was shrewd. While I was talking to Janet and just getting down to solid business, she telephoned to the station and up comes her husband and takes me in. I'll now get to hold my interview at nine to-morrow with Stephen Spick, and I'll squeeze that beet for all the sugar there is in it."

Away went Titus, congratulating himself over his self-manipulated escape, and not long afterward he entered his boarding-house and crept quietly to his room.

He found on the table there a bit of folded paper which when he had opened it he found to read as follows:

"Business of importance will keep me from my office till after the hour set. Let the matter rest till we can make other arrangements."

"STEPHEN SPICK."

The hawk of the ferries did not try to discover how the letter had reached his rooms. He looked at it till his eyes seemed to blaze.

"The old rascal is trying to escape me!" cried he. "He suspects that I hold the winning hand, as I do, and he wants to keep his share of the ten thousand. Well, I don't blame him for that, but I don't intend to be cheated in this manner. When I get a grip on a man or a purse I keep it, no matter what interferes, and the goose I hold now has golden feathers."

Instead of destroying the letter as his rage dictated, Titus crammed it into an inner pocket, seized his hat and departed.

"In the first place I want to make a play on the road!" he exclaimed. "I think I'll let my boy prisoner take care of himself where I left him, and look after the other one."

After a brisk walk of some squares he unlocked the rear door of a house and entered.

Locking the door carefully behind him he passed on to a room in one corner of which he took a dark-lantern from a secret niche, and opened a trap in the floor.

Crouching at the edge of the square hole thus revealed, he threw the beams of his lantern into a dark place and brought to light a haggard upturned face, with deeply sunken eyes full of expectancy.

"When is this torture to end?" asked a voice that trembled as the words came forth.

"You can end it in short meter," answered Titus.

"Tell me how."

"Mebbe it would be no use."

"You have not tried me."

The ferry hawk smiled.

"You're a dead man. You're not here but at the morgue, with a stream of water falling on your corpse."

"Heavens! what do you mean?"

"You've been found by the patrol in the harbor. The police have recognized you by your clothes, and they have ceased to look for you."

"Is this true?" cried the man below shrinking from the bull's eye.

"Do you want proof?"

"Yes, yes."

Titus took from his pocket a bit of paper which he handed down to the man who took it and leaned forward as he shaded his eyes with one hand.

Then the rascal watched him closely as he read the paragraph which had been handed to him.

"It is too true! It is terrible!" he cried, looking up at the hawk of the ferry. "I would not have thought this could have occurred outside of romance. I am apparently dead to the world."

"As dead as if you were six feet under the grass in Greenwood!" was the heartless answer.

The wild eyes were again riveted on Titus, and all at once the prisoner sprung up and caught the frame of the trap with his hands. Then the light revealed that the wrists wore bright steel manacles joined by a stout chain, and Titus gave them a hasty inspection while they remained in view.

"For heaven's sake take me away from here!" pleaded the miserable man. "My child must have died with grief before this. Why am I held? There is nothing more to be taken. I have been plucked to the last penny. I am a beggar."

"Don't take such a view of the case. We might compromise—"

At sound of this word the grip relaxed and the face dropped out of sight, but it was soon seen again.

"I want freedom. I am dead to the world at large. I want to go back to Cherry Vale as Jonas Jackson. What are your terms?"

Titus Todd seemed to take delight in torturing the man in the trap.

"You have a brother," he suggested.

"I had one," was the prompt correction. "He was in the South when the war came on, and it impoverished him, breaking his heart and he died."

"He was very poor then?"

"I hear he was buried by the public."

"What was his name?"

"Nathan Jackson."

"With the brother dead, you have no other relatives living besides—"

"My child!—my Janet!" cried the man in the pit.

"How old is she?"

"Seventeen."

"Still under your care?"

"Yes."

"The girl is old enough and pretty enough, too, to have a husband. Now, don't start, Mr. Jackson, for girls of her age marry every day."

There was no reply for the Jersey merchant—found at last, reader—was looking up into the clean-cut face of the greatest rascal in New York.

"Now, let us talk sense," continued Titus. "You can go out of here in a little while if you will listen to me. You can go back to Jersey or anywhere you please, and start life anew as the man risen from the dead."

"But I must do something to attain my liberty, I see this by your face. Why don't you go on?"

"I'm getting there," smiled Titus coolly. "If you will promise me on your oath that Janet shall become my wife and that you will not seek to arrest those concerned in your disappearance you shall see the sun rise to-morrow. There you have it. Now, what do you say?"

For a moment the face under the bull's-eye seemed to turn into stone, but all at once the eyes flashed and the manacled hands came up as a voice cried:

"Never!"

CHAPTER XIII.

TITUS TACKLES A TARTAR.

"JUST as you say!" laughed Titus Todd derisively getting up. "I've made a fair pro-

position, and it is not likely to be repeated. You won't like your quarters if you keep them much longer. I can't stay here all night. Good-by, Jonas."

The following moment the lantern was withdrawn and the trap-door fell back shutting with a click that sounded like the crack of doom to the man in the dark.

A groan came up to the ferry hawk as the door fell, and he answered it with a laugh that gave the prisoner no hope.

"I'll bend him yet if I find it necessary," growled Titus as he left the house as he had entered, locking all the doors behind him. "Let me see—I am to leave the city immediately. I gave my oath to that effect, completely hoodwinking the hounds of the law. I guess I knew what I was about. They don't catch a bird of my age with chaff. To-morrow at nine my engagement with Stephen comes off, and if I don't add to my funds by some cool work, I'm not Titus Todd."

He strolled toward the law office on his way home, and when near it looked up at the windows.

Although the hour was late he thought he saw a glimmer of light beyond the curtains, and a second look convinced him that he was right.

Crossing the street to the office Titus went softly up the stair and glided to the office door. A key was in the lock which prevented him from seeing into the room, but he did not despair.

He was certain that the office was occupied, and when he found himself baffled at the key-hole, he reached up and caught the crosspiece above the door with his fingers between it and the transom.

Then Titus drew his body up and looked into the room.

At first he saw no one, for the chair at the table was not occupied, but he soon observed a man kneeling before the safe in one corner.

The shape of the man made his identity certain and the hawk of the ferry knew he was looking at Stephen Spick.

The lawyer was going over some papers which he took from the safe, and there was a little heap of them at his left hand.

Titus grew tired of hanging to the door, but he shut his teeth hard and hung on.

At last the lawyer came toward the table with the documents mentioned, and the next moment he held one of them in the blaze of the jet, and kept it there till it burned to his fingers.

These proceedings were repeated many times while Titus watched, and Stephen did not cease till he had destroyed the last paper.

"A sly old fox!" grinned the ferry sharp to himself. "You don't intend to be near this place to-morrow. Can't I see that you are not going to give me a chance to put on the thumb-screws, but you expect to take flight with all your money!"

Spick looked intensely pleased over his performance, and when he had destroyed the last paper he leaned back in his chair and laughed to himself.

If he had looked at the transom at that moment and not at the ashes that littered the table he might have caught sight of a face not altogether to his liking, but Titus enjoyed the scene without being discovered.

Lawyer Spick next went to work and cleaned up the evidences of his act, then, as if he was at peace with the world, he lit a cigar and proceeded to enjoy it.

"I'll break into this paradise while I can," muttered Titus. "He thinks he is safe now, for he has destroyed evidences of more than one dark trick in legal lore, and a search of his safe would prove him an honest man—in court! But you'll want your wits now, Stephen. I propose to take the best feathers from the wings of the golden goose."

Titus dropped noiselessly to the floor and tried to get rid of the soreness in his arms before he took another step in the game.

In a little while he rapped peculiarly on the lawyer's door, and down came Stephen's feet from the table and up he jumped, as if a torpedo had been exploded under him.

He crossed the room and laid his hand on the key.

"You, Sandy?" he asked.

"Me!" replied Titus, disguising his voice. The following moment the key turned in the lock, and Stephen Spick fell back with a cry when he looked into his visitor's face.

Titus returned the look with a flash of triumph, and entered the office without an invitation.

It was evident that he was the last man the

lawyer wanted to see there at that moment, as well he might be, for the hawk of the ferry was, for him, the most dangerous man in New York.

Titus was seen to snuff the air as he advanced toward the table.

"What's been afire, Stephen?" asked he, turning suddenly upon the lawyer, whose face had lost its color.

"Burning!" echoed Stephen. "Nothing that I know of."

"A sly old fox!" mentally noted Titus, and then he dropped into a chair.

"I got your note, and as you thought you would not be able to meet me to-morrow, I thought I'd drop round to-night."

Stephen nearly gasped.

"I just happened in here, and my time is limited," he went on. "To-morrow I shall be occupied, and I thought that—"

"That you'd postpone the meeting, eh?" broke in Titus, a malicious grin settling over his face. "I think I understand the matter, Stephen. But what have you been burning? Smells like old papers to me."

There was no more color for the lawyer to lose, else he would have been made poorer in this connection, and Titus's eagle eyes that lost sight of nothing seemed to look him through.

"Stephen," said the sharp with studied coolness, "I'm on the flat of my back. I want a little loan."

The lawyer started.

He might have known that his visitor had called in the capacity of bleeder, and should have made up his mind to submit to the inevitable.

"You come to a poor bank," he stammered. "Just now I am in no condition to accommodate my friends. A few late investments which have turned out badly—"

"There!" interrupted Titus Todd, touching the lawyer with two of his silken fingers. "Don't go into details. Life is too short for that. I don't want much, Stephen."

"How much?"

"Five thousand dollars."

"Why don't you ask for my head?" cried Stephen Spick, recoiling from the sharper's touch.

"I don't want it, but mebbe the law does," was the cutting retort. "I am here for the loan I was going to ask for to-morrow, but as you will be busy then," here Titus smiled, "we'll transact the little affair to-night. I think you can find that amount in one corner of your treasury, Stephen."

There was no immediate response. The lawyer seeped nailed to his chair, and his eyes regarded his torturer with a glassy stare.

"Come! I can't sit here till doomsday," continued Titus. "You have the money, and you must accommodate me."

"Won't less do you?"

"Not a dollar less. You may feel thankful that I do not make it ten thousand. I ought to do this in justice to myself. Hurry up."

Stephen Spick at that moment fully realized the strength of the cords by which he was bound to the vulture of the ferry.

There was no mercy in Titus's eyes, and the cold curling of his lip proved that he would not be softened.

Beating down his indignation, Stephen pushed back his chair, and looked at the safe he had just locked.

"You are as deep in the mire as I am," he ventured as a last resort.

Titus laughed.

"No, my dear Stephen. You do me too much honor in your remarks. I don't choke people in their own rooms!"

The lawyer appeared to stagger.

The bolt had gone straight to the target, and had pierced the center.

"I'll take the amount in large bills," continued Titus, dropping back to his oily manners with ease.

A sudden change came over Stephen Spick. He seemed to brace himself for a struggle to retain his wealth, as well as to save his neck. To give up five thousand dollars was like letting out his blood; he loved both with undying devotion.

Titus watched him closely as he went to the safe, and saw him stoop before the door. The next second Stephen's hand was at the lock.

"Hey! the lock is broken!" suddenly cried the lawyer.

The ferry sharp started forward, and leaned over Stephen's shoulders.

"No playing it, Stephen," he said. "Remember; I hold your life in my hands. I can give the police a certain clew—"

"Which you will never do!" was the inter-

ruption, and Stephen Spick sprung up like a crouching tiger, and was at Titus's throat before that rascal could lift a hand to beat off the attack.

Stephen had the strength of an athlete in his long limbs and lean body, and Titus Todd found himself in the grip of no ordinary man when he went backward with ten hot fingers tearing and gripping at his throat.

Down went the two men on the floor, and in their struggle for the mastery they rolled hither and thither, now almost under the table, and now against the safe.

"It is 'now or never'!" murmured Spick. "If I silence this man I am safe, for he holds the secret that would break my neck in the Tombs!"

CHAPTER XIV.

TRAP-DOOR AND KNIFE.

LET US leave the two villains battling on the floor of Spick and Spann's office, and go back to Dodger Dick, whom we left on his way to the little old house with a key and some information furnished him by Bob White, the river crook.

Dick was pretty certain of finding "something" in the crypt. If he had been a little quicker he would have captured Titus Todd in the house, but, as it was, the hawk of the ferry made his escape in the nick of time.

The boy detective was elated over his success in the interview with Bob White. It was one of the luckiest accidents of his life.

When he searched the house he made his way to the rear entrance, and entered with the assistance of the key.

He found the rooms dark and forbidding, but groped his way to the one designated by the thief.

In one corner he discovered the button, and pressed it firmly with his heel.

Something clicked, and the trap was at his service.

In a little time the eager boy had worked the door loose, and with a lantern to help him—a lantern found just where Bob White said there was one—he was soon looking down into the pit beneath.

"Are you there, Mr. Jackson?" called the young ferret, and his voice echoed weirdly in the gloom.

There was no reply.

"I am a friend," resumed Dick. "I am here to take you out of the clutches of the outlaws. Answer me if you live."

Back came the echo of his words, nothing more. The boy became discouraged.

At last he leaned down into the darkness, and held the lantern lower still.

Suddenly a wild cry broke over his lips.

In one corner of the dungeon lay a figure that bore a resemblance to a man. It was surrounded by filth, and Dick thought he saw a pair of manacles on the hands.

"Am I too late?" he exclaimed. "Woe to the vultures if I have found their victim dead!"

A moment later, with his lantern fastened to his person, the daring Dodger swung himself into the gloom, and then dropped to the floor.

An eager spring carried him to the object he had noticed, and he was bending over it, holding his breath, while he stared as he had never stared before.

"I have found him! I have discovered Jonas Jackson!" he cried. "There is life here. The man has fainted, and no wonder, in a place like this!"

There was a pitcher of poor water near the man, and the Dodger used it in bringing him back to consciousness, a task which occupied some time.

It was some minutes before the trio's victim could believe that his companion was not the heartless rascal who had lately left him, after submitting the most infamous of propositions, and when he realized that he had been found by a friend, he threw his arms round Dick's neck in transports of joy.

"That's all right," laughed the Dodger. "I like to see you happy, for I would act just this way, I presume, if I was in your place. But we want to get out of here, so that we can fight the villains with their own weapons."

Jonas Jackson held out his hands and showed Dick the manacles.

"We'll get them off, too," the boy said. "And before long we'll have them on other wrists. This beats all the pieces of villainy I ever had to deal with. The body fished from the river by the patrol, and supposed to be yours, will have to go to the Potter's Field unnamed, for you're going back to Jersey as Jonas Jackson, Esquire, safe and sound!"

The missing man was very eager to escape from the disgusting place which had been his habitation so long, and before Dick had listened to one-half of his story, he was ready to conduct him away.

Suddenly, without an instant's warning, the trap-door fell back, and Dodger Dick sprung from the merchant with an exclamation which he could not suppress.

There flashed through his mind Bob White's story of how he was once shut up in the dungeon by the dropping of that very door.

"Heavens! what has happened?" asked Jonas Jackson, in the darkness, while Dick was holding the lantern up so as to make out, if possible, the fastenings of the door.

"A good deal, I'm afraid," he replied. "The trap has dropped, and is immovable."

"Merciful God!" rung from Jackson's throat. "Then we are helpless, for the door catches when it falls, and cannot be opened from beneath."

If this was true, then the two friends were in a most deplorable situation.

They were liable to perish there while Titus Todd and his associates, scot free, could triumph at their leisure.

The boy shadow continued to inspect the door.

"What do you make out?" asked the Jersey merchant.

"I can't see a catch of any kind," was the answer. "The piece of chain that hangs from the middle of the door has nothing to do with its lock, but it may give me a chance to make my investigation more thorough."

Dick stepped back a pace and then jumped at the dangling chain, which he caught, and by which he drew himself up to the under side of the door itself.

He could now give the trap a better examination, and he did so, while Jackson directed the full focus of the lantern's light upon it.

For five minutes Dodger Dick clung to the chain and worked diligently with hands and eyes.

"There is but one way out," said he, dropping at the merchant's feet.

"And that is—"

"By the trap."

Jonas Jackson's countenance fell.

"The plank is thick, but it will yield to steel."

"But the steel, boy?"

Dick produced his pocket-knife and exhibited it triumphantly.

"Do you think you can win the battle with that?" asked the prisoner, with a look of disdain. "I would want a better help."

Dodger Dick returned a smile and prepared to go to work under the adverse circumstances that confronted them.

By scraping the rubbish that littered the floor of the pit into a heap directly beneath the door, Dick was enabled to reach the wood, and without any further ado he fell to with his knife, and soon made little splinters fly.

The missing Jerseyman held the light, with hope and despair strangely mingled on his haggard countenance, and seemed to count the minutes as he watched the progress of the boy ferret's labors.

Every now and then Dick was compelled to rest. He saw that the progress made was very slow, and feared that it was a work of days.

"Constant dripping wears the stone, so will sticking at our work get us on the outside," he laughed, merrily, to white-faced Jonas Jackson, who had just expressed his feelings in downcast words.

It must have been morning when Dick paused for the twentieth time, for a singular sound came in to the crypt.

The Jerseyman said that he had heard the same noises at intervals ever since his imprisonment, and Dick thought it came from the vehicles on the street.

"I am half way through," reported the Dodger. "I have cut a ring large enough to admit of the passage of my arm, and I hope to be able to press the button and unlock the trap."

These words were hardly out of the boy's mouth when snap went the blade and Jonas Jackson uttered a cry of bitter grief.

Dick dropped back and held out the knife with a smile.

The blade had broken close to the handle, and the catastrophe was most unfortunate.

For several moments the two captives of the dungeon stood in silence with their eyes fastened on the knife.

The merchant trembled like a leaf, and Dick pitied him from the depths of his honest heart.

"Fate is against us!" groaned Jackson, looking into the boy's face. "We are destined to perish here at the mercy of a wolf like Titus Todd."

"I don't give up till I have to!" exclaimed the Dodger. "I admit that this is the closest trap I've ever been in, but there's a way out, and it is for us!"

Before long the young Vidocq had taken the broken knife apart, and had driven the main-spring into the end of a bit of wood found in the crypt.

Then he proceeded to sharpen one end of the mainspring to edge and point on the hard cement that formed the four walls, and when he had finished he held his work before Jackson with a laugh.

The Jerseyman looked amazed.

"No trap can hold a boy like you!" he exclaimed. "I am not going to despair again!"

Once more Dick went back to his interrupted task. He found the improvised tool superior to the one he had used before, and at the end of another hour of toil he broke his way up through the trap-door and ran his hand out.

Then he felt everywhere for the bottom in the floor, but, to his surprise, he could not discover it.

CHAPTER XV.

COOL PROCEEDINGS.

IT WAS while Dodger Dick was working for life and liberty in the dungeon of the old house, that the fierce struggle between Titus Todd and Stephen Spick was on at the latter's office.

The lawyer fully realized the situation, and therefore fought with all his might to prevent being overpowered by his adversary.

The ferry hawk at the same time knew that if he lost the contest, he would lose the five thousand dollars for which he had come, and this thought rendered his resistance the more bitter.

Suddenly Titus succeeded in getting his hands on Stephen's throat, and he took immediate advantage of the good fortune.

He choked Mr. Spick till he grew black in the face, after which he dragged him to a chair and crushed him into it.

When the lawyer came to be found himself securely bound to the chair, with the leering face of Titus a few feet away.

He had lost the battle.

"You will act like a man now, I presume," the sharp of the ferries said. "The next time you don't want to play cyclone when you don't know how the affair is going to terminate. It isn't very good policy, Stephen, and besides a victory is sometimes worse than a defeat—in the long run, I mean."

Stephen Spick said nothing. He was still gasping for the breath of which he had been deprived by the severe choking, and there were finger-marks under his chin.

"We'll proceed to the interrupted business," continued Titus, with another of his aggravating grins. "I'll just push your chair over to the safe and you can open it."

Stephen groaned inwardly, but there was no help for him.

Without further ado, the ferry hawk pushed him across the office floor and brought him up before the safe.

"Now open it," he commanded, in stern tones. "I am in need of the loan I asked for awhile ago, and I can't stand on ceremony."

The lawyer looked up appealingly, but the face he saw was as cold and merciless as marble, and he went back to the safe.

The reader may imagine what his thoughts were while he manipulated the knob on which were the figures of the combination.

Titus Todd was staring over him like an evil spirit, and he could not trust himself to look up into those triumphant eyes again.

At last he pulled the door open and took out a small iron drawer, in which there were plenty of notes.

His arms were free enough to use though his body had been lashed firmly to the chair.

Titus watched him like a fox while he counted a pile of bank-notes on his knee.

"I'll take another thousand, Stephen," he remarked coolly. "I know where I can put it just now."

"Do you want to beggar me?" groaned the lawyer.

"Not for the world would I," was the retort. "You seem to be flush enough to give me the extra accommodation. Another ten hundred, if you please."

Biting his lips till they reddened, Stephen counted out the extra thousand. He was completely at the mercy of the man who stood over him.

As the last crisp note fell upon the heap Todd snatched the whole before Stephen could insist on a recount.

"Thanks, old fellow!" he laughed, thrusting the bills into an inner pocket. "I'll not give my I O U for this for you might not want to have it found in your possession. You won't have to keep office alone very long I hope. Hereafter, Stephen, proceed to business immediately and don't try to play a wolfish game. Aha! good-night. I'll see you later."

A cry burst from the lawyer.

"Are you going to leave me in this condition?" he glanced down at his bonds.

"Why not?" replied Titus. "Sandy will be along by-and-by, and you can say that you were robbed by a masked man, who took undue advantage of you. Ha, ha! a good joke," and Titus withdrew.

A madder person than the one left behind could not have been found in New York. He stormed over his situation and cursed the man who had made off with six thousand dollars of good money.

Yet, what could he do? Was he not in the power of that very villain, and did not Titus Todd possess a secret which the lawyer-sharp would not have divulged for the world?

Verily the rattlesnake was in the folds of the anaconda!

As to Titus he went almost direct to his boarding-house.

If he had known what was transpiring in the old house he might have turned aside to investigate, and he would have discovered something startling, too.

He had not forgotten his solemn promise to quit New York without delay, and was in a condition to go away with a neat sum of money.

But he had made up his mind to play the bold game out, and his robbing of his old companion in rascality was but one of the side-plays which should make him "solid," as he went along.

Having put the money where he knew it would be safe, Titus proceeded to don a disguise which seemed to remove every vestige of identity. He no longer wore the handsome waxed mustache of the ferry hawk. He had clipped the ends of his treasure, thereby sadly mutilating it, and had otherwise changed his appearance till the closest observer would not have seen anything of Titus Todd about him.

"I think Sandy is just as flush as Stephen was, but I'll not bother him," murmured the crook. "I have a hold on Stephen that'll give me another pull when I want it. He looked like he was going to drop into his coffin when I said something about Little Ajax, the Wonder, being choked to death in his chair. Aha! Stephen Spick, what deadly hands you have!"

Titus did not hesitate to seek the street in his new disguise, for he felt that he was proof against the perceptive powers of the keenest detective, and even thought he could visit Mrs. Trupp with impunity.

It was daylight now, and the streets of New York were putting on their roar and bustle.

Titus went down-town and looked up at the office-windows with a grin on his face. He wondered if Stephen Spick was still there bound in the chair, and gnashing his teeth over the trick which had been played on him.

As he turned away there came up the street the figure of Sandy Spann, and Titus stopped to look at the man.

He saw him run up the steps that led to the office, and a minute afterward the curtains at the windows were pulled up from the inside.

"Stephen has escaped from durance," smiled the ferry hawk to himself. "The curtains would not be up now if there was anything unusual about the office. He must have twisted out before Sandy came."

He was right.

Mr. Spann did not find anything out of place in the room.

The chairs stood in their accustomed places, and everything had a familiar look.

Sandy sat down at the table and began to write. He was not afraid of being disturbed at that hour in the day.

All at once he heard a series of footsteps in the hall beyond the door.

He stopped in his work, poised his pen above the paper and listened.

"They're none of our clients, and I don't want to see them if they were," he growled.

But just then the footsteps stopped at the door. Then there was a knock.

"Come in," answered Sandy Spann, and the opening door revealed the well-built figure of a boy, backed by a man who had a haggard look and a person who had a stern official look.

The three advanced while Sandy's eyes seemed about to fly from his head, and suddenly with an exclamation of horror he bounced out of his chair and retreated almost to the windows.

"Good-morning, Mr. Spann. I think we have met before," spoke the hollow-eyed man, at whom Sandy was staring as if he had just seen him rise from a tomb.

"Of course you two have," remarked the boy. "This gentleman, Mr. Spann, is Jonas Jackson, the merchant of Cherry Vale who left home some weeks ago and who has been missing ever since. This other gentleman can speak for himself."

The stranger came forward.

"We want you for conspiracy and robbery," he said to Sandy. "You are one of three who conspired against Mr. Jackson, and into whose hands ten thousand dollars of his money fell. His life has also been attempted in the most heartless manner. You will open the safe behind you and give us an opportunity of inspecting it."

"There isn't a dollar of any man's money in there!" stammered the lawyer. "I have been robbed by my partner or by some one else. Of course I'll open the safe for you. Who is that boy?"

"Dodger Dick at your service," laughed the robust, keen-eyed youth who took great delight in making the announcement. "Mrs. Spann will surrender her new watch which Mother Sturgeon got a peep at to other officers who are at your house by this time. Mr. Jackson is sure he bought just such a watch for Janet while you were showing him the city. I guess we've at last got a hold on the firm of Spick and Spann. Now, when we nab Titus Todd we'll see that you fellows have company up the Hudson."

Sandy Spann was as white as a cloth, and his eyes sent daggers at the boy Vidocq.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HAWK'S CLAWS.

For the first time in his life the junior member of the firm of Spick and Spann was behind the bars.

It was by no means the first time he should have been there, but this time he had made several "blunders" as he expressed it to himself, and now was about to suffer the consequences.

Dodger Dick was elated over his share in the arrest, as he had a right to be. He had succeeded in unraveling the mystery which for more than three weeks had enshrouded the fate of Jonas Jackson, the Jersey merchant.

The next and concluding events of the game were to be the capture of Stephen Spick and Titus Todd.

It was agreed that the arrest of Sandy should be kept secret so as not to frighten the birds away, and he had been taken to the station as quietly as possible.

"Cornered, eh? Caught with his eyes shut!" ejaculated a man who saw the lawyer emerge from the building in the officer's care. "Well, old fellow, you'll give the whole scheme away just to save your own precious neck, and I'll be the next man picked up if you can have your way."

The man who thus addressed himself happened to be near the building. He did not look much like Titus Todd, for there were no waxed ends of a black mustache, but he was the ferry hawk himself.

Immediately Titus disappeared, and though Dick and the detectives hunted high and low for him all day, they did not so much as get a glimpse of his trail.

It was nearing ten o'clock at night when a young man left a plain house on one of the unfashionable streets of the city, and stopped on the step to talk to a young girl of seventeen, whose face beamed with newly-found joy.

"The light has come at last, Gerald," smiled she. "Father has come back as one from the dead, and we shall be happy again even though we are obliged to begin life anew. The police say it is one of the strangest circumstances they have ever had dealings with. That a dead body should be found in the river dressed in garments the exact counterparts of those worn by father when he left home is one of the unexplainable things. Lawyer Spann is ready to confess, in hopes that he may save himself; but Dodger Dick and others—yourself among them—have worked up evidence enough to convict him with the other two when they have been caught. The ten thousand dollars they took from father have not been found, but we hope to get some of it back when Stephen Spick and Titus Todd are caught. I am keeping house alone just now. Father is with Officer Trupp down at the station, and Mrs. Trupp has been called to see a sick relative."

The young man listened to the girl—Janet—with a pleased smile.

He was rejoiced at her happiness.

"We owe a good deal to the boy who never halted for a moment, but who kept right on till he reached the end," he remarked.

"To Dodger Dick!" cried Janet. "Without him I am sure father would not have been found. If we get any of the lost money back we intend to reward him handsomely; if it is lost for good his reward will come by and by."

A minute afterward Gerald Gray bade Janet good-night, and walked away while the door was shut and locked.

Hardly had the latter event taken place ere a man came from the shadow of a building near by and eyed the Trupp residence for a few moments.

"Alone, hey?" he muttered. "I guess I heard every word, and this information was given by the girl. So I am to be trapped by the ferrets and made to see that my game has failed. We'll try one more hand, my bird. I don't give up till no play is left."

With this he stepped quickly to the house, ran up the steps and jerked the bell with a force that threatened to tear it loose.

In a moment there were footsteps in the hall beyond.

"Who is there?" asked a voice in feminin tones.

"A messenger from the young man who has just been hurt round the corner," was the response. "Are you Mrs. Trupp or the young lady?"

By this time the door was unlocked and in a second Janet with a blanched face was holding it open, and looking him in the face.

"Who is hurt?" she inquired almost breathless.

"The young man who has just been here. He was crossing the street—runaway team—could not get out of the way—people shouted to him—it was terrible, miss!"

Janet leaned against the door frame and gasped, but for a moment only.

"Where is he?" she cried suddenly springing erect. "Did he send you to me?"

"First question first, miss. He is at the druggist's next street, about a square away: and he wanted somebody to go quick to Officer Trupp's house for the young lady there. Are you the young person?"

"I am Janet!" cried the eager girl. "Is he badly hurt?"

"We hope not, miss, and the doctor seems to think he'll pull through."

"But why do I stand here? He wants me to come. But where is he—tell me?"

"I can take you straight to him if you care to trust me," was the response as the man stepped back and looked at Janet. "He is waiting for you, and—"

"I will go!" broke in the young girl, and turning back into the hall she took a hat from a handy rack, and put herself under his care.

Under no other circumstances would Janet Jackson have done an act of this kind. But her mind was confused, she could think of nothing but her friend lying helpless, if not mangled, a few steps away; and with such a prospect before her she was liable to forget certain cautionary instructions she had received.

Escorted by the man Janet left the house and turned into the next street.

They went on and on.

"I thought it was near," said she suddenly looking up into her conductor's face.

At that moment she saw a change in the eyes that met hers, and then a hand encircled her own.

Janet drew back, a cry on her lips, but it was suddenly stifled by a cloth that fell over her head and which was drawn tightly against her face, preventing outcry of any kind.

The girl's brain seemed to swim, and when she was lifted off her feet and borne rapidly away, she felt that all was lost.

It seemed a long time before Janet recovered consciousness, and when she came to she saw a man watching her from a chair which stood near a table while she lay on a cot in one corner of the same room.

In an instant the young Jersey girl was on her feet, and starting forward she looked into the grinning face of her companion.

"Don't you know me?" he asked leaning forward that she might all the better see him.

"Yes, yes," cried Janet falling back though looking at him. "You are the man called Titus Todd!"

He did not answer her, but shut his eyes peculiarly, then opened them, and smiled another smile of victory.

"How long have I been here?" demanded the girl.

"Not very long, miss."

"Then there was no accident, no young man who wanted nursing at the druggist's?"

"If there was I didn't see 'em," he replied.

She looked at him wondering, no doubt, how men could be so desperately wicked, and he did not try to break her thoughts.

"What I want is this," said he at last when he saw that she had studied him apparently from every point of view. "I want to transact a little business with your father."

"After what has happened?" exclaimed Janet. "Don't you know that the police want you for one of the most infamous crimes?"

"They're always wanting somebody!" laughed Titus Todd. "But really, miss, I have some business to transact with your father even after what has passed as you say. You write a good letter I believe and he will recognize your hand at a glance. Please come up to the table here where I have paper, pens and ink."

Janet held aloof, whereat the cool rascal broke out into another laugh.

"Holding back won't mend matters!" cried he. "I have the upper-hand, and all the ferrets in New York, that fox-like boy included—are powerless to break it. I want to write to your father saying that you are alive and well, that circumstances keep you for the present from him, and that you will return on certain conditions."

Janet did not ask to have the conditions explained. She knew that some new villainy was afoot, and in a moment made up her mind that she would not be a party to it.

Titus Todd leaned far back in his chair and studied her coolly a few minutes.

"You don't seem to take kindly to my proposition, miss," he suddenly resumed. "Well, I see I have to discipline you."

He leaped out of the chair and caught Janet by the arm before she could escape.

"Come to the table, girl. Take a seat in this chair. There! that is good. Now write to your father and say that when you return to him you will be the wife of Titus Todd, and you beg that he will not prosecute his affectionate son-in-law."

Janet looked into the face almost touching hers and then, with an exclamation of horror and defiance, she threw down the pen which had been placed in her hands.

The ferry hawk only laughed.

CHAPTER XVII.

PICKED UP.

AT any rate, the following day the letter-carrier brought to Officer Trupp's house a letter addressed to Jonas Jackson.

Janet's absence had been discovered the night before, and the police of New York were on the alert.

The Jersey merchant opened the letter with trembling hands, and a moment afterward, with a startling cry, fell back into the arms of Thomas Trupp.

Well might the old man be affected, for the missive, when picked up from the floor, was found to read as follows:

"DEAR FATHER:—I am safe and sound and contented. By the time this reaches you I will be the wife of Mr. Titus Todd a gentleman whom you have accused of crime. If you wish to see your daughter's face again, you will forgive her husband, whom she loves, and refuse to let the police prosecute him for any act. A letter addressed to Janet, Box 92, No. 777, S—street, will reach me.

"Your loving child, JANET."

Dodger Dick happened to be present when this startling letter was read.

The boy was amazed.

"I don't believe she ever wrote a line of that voluntarily," he exclaimed. "I think that she is in Titus Todd's clutches, and there's no telling what will happen if she is permitted to remain there. Number 777, S—street must be watched. It is one of those places where letter-boxes are rented by the month, and the ferry hawk has secured one for a purpose. As for Janet loving that first-class rascal, it is all gammon. I want to find him worse than ever now, and in order to do so I am willing to let Stephen Spick escape for a time."

Jonas Jackson answered the letter in a quivering hand, and addressed it as desired.

A detective was stationed to watch the private post-office, but the day passed without any one calling for the reply.

Meantime the boy ferret of New York had not been idle. He knew that Titus Todd would not venture on the streets in his old dress, so he did not expect to see him in that shape. He spent a good deal of time among the ferry

hawk's old haunts, and tried to track him by well-timed interviews with some of his associates, but they were all too sharp for him, and he obtained no news.

At the same time, other eyes as keen as his were on the alert for Stephen Spick, the villainous lawyer who was wanted to join his less fortunate partner behind the bars, but Stephen had disappeared as effectually as though he had sought the bottom of the harbor.

It was after dark, and the streets of New York were still full of bustle and business when Dodger Dick noticed a man who walked rapidly toward that portion of the city where one of the great depots stands.

He seemed in a hurry, yet he did not patronize the street-cars, and the boy ferret, after following him a few minutes, concluded that he had made an important discovery.

The man kept on, now and then looking nervously back, and increasing his gait till it was the next thing to a run.

Dick followed him to the very doors of the depot, into which he plunged like a fugitive reaching cover.

On the inside he pulled his hat over his eyes and sought out the darkest corner, after glancing at the clock that marked the time of night.

"Going off, eh?" ejaculated Dick, as he watched the man from a secluded place. "I've had some dealings with cross-trails before, and the moment I saw your swinging figure I thought I had struck another. Which way, Stephen? Are you going West to grow up with the country? Bound for grasshopper Kansas, maybe. Well, you're not likely to get very far!"

Thus the young detective talked to himself, while he also watched the man he had tracked down.

He could not be mistaken, for he knew Stephen Spick only too well to be deceived by one bearing even a slight resemblance to him. A man may disguise himself in various ways, but his step, if he has a peculiar one, will be sure to reveal him, and this is what had betrayed the flying lawyer.

At last the Dodger went over to where his victim was sitting, and dropped into a seat alongside.

Stephen gave the boy a quick, suspicious glance, but did not seem to see anything dangerous about him.

"When does the next train go out?" asked Dick, who did not look much like the boy who frequented Mother Sturgeon's rooms.

The suspected man shook his head.

"Ain't you going somewhere?" persisted the Dodger.

"What if I am?" growled Stephen Spick.

Dick looked up into his face and could not suppress a smile.

"See here," continued he, laying his hand on the man's arm in such a manner that he started at the touch. "Don't you think you'd better stay here and face the music?"

In an instant the arm was jerked from the boy's touch and Stephen Spick was staring at him with very little color left on his shingle face.

"I mean just what I say," the young ferret went on. "There is no use in running off in this manner. You are Stephen Spick, and your partner Sandy is in the hands of the law."

"My God!" cried the disguised lawyer and then with a quick glance toward the door where a big man stood looking him squarely in the eye he toned down his voice. "What has Sandy said since they've had him?"

Dick made a sign for the officer to keep off, and then answered the lawyer.

"He's told a good deal, Stephen. They want you on the charge of conspiracy."

The man took in a long breath.

"Is that all?" he exclaimed. "Then call up the man in the door yonder. I know he is an officer by the way he looks at me. Conspiracy, eh? I'll make it hot for the man who hatched the plot and who robbed me in my own office. I'll show him that he is in stronger pickle than I am. Yes, I want to turn on Titus Todd, and let him know that I can strike back and blast all his hopes."

"Where is Titus?"

"What! haven't you found him yet?" cried Stephen. "I thought you had him by this time though he is a slick one. I'll give you all his haunts. I guess I know them all, and it'll do me good to make out a complete list. He doesn't know that I once employed a private detective to find them for me for I always thought the rascal would serve me a mean trick some time."

A minute afterward the burly officer crossed

the room and the lawyer found himself under arrest.

Instead of appearing crestfallen and down-hearted he laughed boldly at the charge of conspiracy, never dreaming that a more serious one awaited him.

At the station to which he was conducted he gave Dodger Dick and the officers a list of the places known as Titus Todd's haunts. Among them was the old house from which the boy ferret had rescued Jonas Jackson.

"If Titus is in the city look for him here," said Stephen, placing his finger on one of the addresses he had furnished. "I know you will call it a quiet neighborhood and laugh when I insinuate that a thorough-paced villain like the ferry hawk would hide there, but look for him there first. Oh! don't I want to pay the rascal back for fleecing me?"

Armed with this information Dodger Dick left the station and was once more on the streets.

A few minutes later he was crossing one of the public squares when all at once he found himself face to face with a man who seemed bent on avoiding him.

There was a glitter in the dark eyes that attracted the boy shadow, and as he pretended not to recognize the man and walked ahead he was caught from behind and thrown across one of the heavy benches that dotted the grass.

The attack was too quick for Dick to sound the least alarm, and when he struck the wood with his head his senses swam, and all became suddenly dark!

"Still at work, eh?" exclaimed the man as he turned away with a final look at his young victim lying senseless on the bench. "I guess I'm equal to the emergency. The old man wrote a letter that shows that he will yield gracefully, and I don't want any interference till the thing's accomplished. Don't follow me, my young fox. I've got teeth!"

He crossed the Square apparently unseen, and was swallowed up in the living tide that rolled over the sidewalk beyond.

As to the boy, some minutes later a man found him lying unconscious on the ground at the foot of the bench, and he was carried into the nearest drug store.

There he recovered in a short time, and jumping from the hands of the doctor, disappeared.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DODGER'S VICTORY.

"HERE! I reckon you'll say this is genuine! The writing is very even, but then it will look familiar in your eyes. Take your father's answer, Janet, and don't fight against the odds you can never overcome."

The time was an hour after Dodger Dick's adventure in the Park, and Titus Todd threw the letter he held in his hand upon the table near which stood the beautiful young girl whom his net had caught.

Janet Jackson looked at the superscription of the letter, and then glanced at the ferry hawk whose features, cold and hard, confirmed the desperate game he was playing.

"What!" cried Titus, bounding forward with fire in his eyes. "Don't you intend to touch your father's letter? Girl, you don't know what happiness it may contain for you. Open it and read."

But Janet stood firm, with her lips closely knitted and her hands tightly clinched.

"Go on, I say!" thundered the big ruffian, and he paused beside the girl like a maddened tiger.

Janet drew back and gave him a look of defiance.

"No! You forced the decoy letter from me. I broke his heart when I wrote at your dictation, and I have determined, come what may, to take no further steps in this drama of infamy."

Titus Todd drew off and for a few seconds looked steadily at the girl.

"Well," cried he suddenly, "if you will not open the letter I will do so myself."

Then he picked up the missive and tore it open. In another moment he was holding its contents before his eyes, while Janet, resolved not to hear, had covered her ears with her hands.

"Things are going smoothly, my girl," laughed he, looking up into the white face of his victim.

"Your father writes that he doesn't like to receive me as his son-in-law, but that he will not turn his girl and her husband out of the house."

Janet heard none of this, seeing which, Titus flew into a rage, and thrust the letter into his pocket.

"If you think," continued he, "that that sharp-nosed young street fox, Dodger Dick, can

smell me out here, you count without your host. I left the ferret awhile ago pretty much the worse for having met me. I guess he won't seek another street introduction. Talk about a boy outwitting Titus Todd! It is ridiculous, ha, ha, ha!"

When Janet found herself alone she threw herself into a chair and buried her face in her hands.

For a moment she was in despair, but all at once springing from the chair, she seemed to get new life, and her face got back much of its old color as she exclaimed:

"I will not bend to him! I intend to fight it out in this way if it costs me my life! I may worry Titus Todd till Dodger Dick and the detectives strike his trail; then the end will come."

"Do you think so, my girl?" sounded on her ears and the sentence was accompanied by a coarse laugh. "If you wait till then you will be old and gray, for I am the match of all the police of New York!"

Janet saw the ferry hawk standing on the step of a door which had noiselessly opened, and when his laugh ended he shut the portal and disappeared.

Dodger Dick's insensibility had lasted longer than he thought.

From the time when he was seized in the Park by the man—Titus Todd in disguise—and flung across the bench to the moment of his springing from the doctor's hands more than an hour had elapsed.

The rather bad cut on his head had been closed by the surgeon, and he was ready and eager for the trail.

When attacked he was on his way to one of the secret haunts of the ferry hawk which Stephen Spick had exposed from motives of revenge, and now he intended to make up for the lost time.

The house occupied a place on a quiet street and Dick was soon in the vicinity with his eyes open.

It was a double house, with two front doors built close together, and Dick was somewhat puzzled when he noticed this.

While he was inspecting the premises, one of the doors opened and a man came out.

"I would like to catch my man away from the house," thought the young ferret, as he watched the person who came almost directly toward him. "He is desperate enough to do violence to Janet if I was to confront him where she is, and not for the world would I see one hair of the young lady harmed."

The man who had left the house led Dick a lively chase down-town.

He was reasonably certain that he was again on Titus Todd's trail, and he made up his mind to keep it, with no further interruptions, to the end.

He followed his quarry up one street and down another. The man did not seem to suspect that any one was on his trail, and Dick had resolved that the Park affair should not be repeated.

The ferry hawk did not stop till he reached the house occupied by Sandy Spann when that worthy was at home, but just now he was, where we saw him last, behind the bars.

What was he going to do there? Dick saw him ring the bell, and then he drew near enough, by creeping through the shadows of the building, to hear the door open.

"Is Mrs. Spann home?" asked Titus, touching his hat to the woman who had answered his ring.

"Mrs. Spann doesn't live here," was the reply.

"What?" stammered the wolf in velvet. "Doesn't live here? Isn't this O—street?"

"Certainly it is, and this is the house once, and till very lately, too, occupied by the Spanns. Mr. Spann, I hear, is under arrest, and his wife left this morning."

Dick heard Titus give a whistle of surprise.

"You don't know where I would be likely to see Mrs. Spann?" he asked.

"I can't say. We don't take care of anybody but ourselves, and that keeps us busy," was the tart retort, and the door was shut in the rascal's face, and he was left alone on the step.

"No additional feathers there!" exclaimed he. "I thought I would add to the little pile I got from Stephen, but Mrs. Spann has disappeared. It looks as if she doesn't care much for Sandy, whom she has left to his fate. Well, I'm off once more."

Dodger Dick once more threw himself upon the ferry sharp's track.

Titus did not know exactly what to do. He

seemed to have been disconcerted by his fruitless mission to Mrs. Spann's, and this was shown by the hesitating manner with which he stopped on a street-corner in the midst of a mental debate.

"Captain," said the young ferret, gliding up to a man who stood a few yards from Titus, "I want the big fellow on the corner yonder—the man in the long coat and brown straw hat."

"Who is he, Dick?"

"The most wanted rascal in Gotham at this time—Titus Todd."

"Then, you shall have him," was the prompt response.

Motioning for the officer to follow him, Dick walked up behind Titus and touched him on the arm.

"Good-night, Mr. Todd!" he exclaimed, as the hawk of the ferries wheeled as if he had received a shock from an electric battery. "Yes, this is the man, Captain Claude—this is our old friend, Titus, the river wolf!"

Before the astonished man could recover, he found bracelets of steel at his wrists, and Dick was showing his last triumph in a pair of dancing black eyes.

"Wait!" growled Titus, as his brow grew dark and his figure leaned toward the boy. "When I am out of this I'll make you wish you had never seen a trail!"

"When you are out of it, eh, Titus? That may not be for some time!" laughed the young ferret in response, and then the netted hawk was led away.

Not long after Titus Todd's arrest there was a joyful reunion at Thomas Trupp's house, and Dodger Dick had the satisfaction of seeing Janet once more in her father's arms.

Stephen Spick found lodged against him the serious charge of murder, for there was proof that it was his hand that had put an end to Little Ajax's career as a second-sight Wonder.

Titus Todd and Sandy Spann were tried for conspiracy and abduction, and both received long terms of imprisonment, which they are serving yet.

Stephen was never tried, for, coward-like, he committed suicide in his cell, and much of the money he left behind was paid to Jonas Jackson, the victim of the three.

I believe that Dodger Dick was prouder of this victory than of any he had won before, for he had won it with very little assistance and was entitled to the honors of the conquest.

He saw Janet become the wife of her young friend Gerald Gray, and took a vacation long enough to go to Cherry Vale where the young couple went at once to housekeeping.

Jonas Jackson was satisfied with his experience among the wolves of New York, and he never tires of telling how he owes his life and Janet her happiness to the young Vidocq of the great metropolis—the boy who makes his farewell bow to the patient reader—Dodger Dick!

THE END.

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